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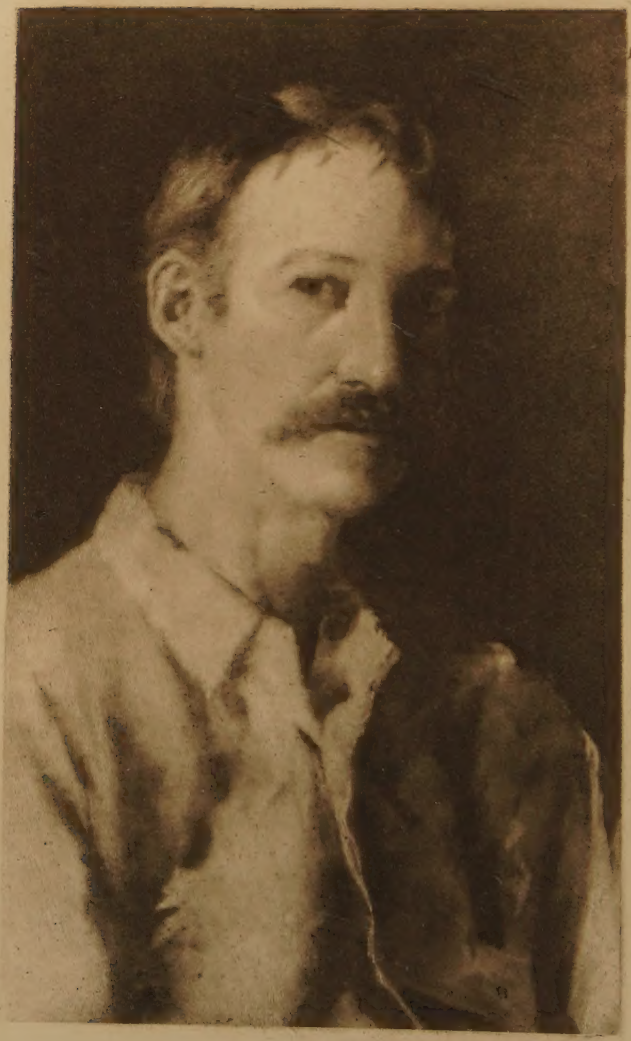

Yours truly
Robert Louis Stevenson

From a Portrait by Count Girolamo Nerli. Painted at Samoa in 1894.

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

A LIFE STUDY IN CRITICISM

BY

H. BELLYSE BAILDON

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WITH TWO PORTRAITS

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PREFACE

So much has been written about Robert Louis Stevenson, and much of it, such as Sidney Colvin's article in the "National Dictionary of Biography," and his admirable introductory chapter in "Letters to his Family and Friends," is so excellently well done, that it may seem officious to add a stone to the growing cairn. But the present writer has one advantage, even over Professor Colvin, in that he knew Stevenson years before the editor of the "Letters" was aware of his existence. Louis "brewed a peck o' maut," and Colvin, Leslie Stephen, and Hamerton, and the rest of the world, "cam' to pree." But I claim to have been present at the mixing of the "brew," and even to have had some hand in it, and pree'd it when far from mature. To change the metaphor, I watched the plant when still in bud, before a single one of its perfect blossoms had freed itself from its green wrappages, and thence onward, till, in full beauty and splendour, it was cut down and blackened by the frost of Death.

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This life study of my old school friend has grown up by various stages. First I wrote a brief obituary in the *Daily News* when first the tidings of his death struck me like a blow that blinds and darkens; then "Some Reminiscences" appeared from my pen in *Temple Bar* for March 1895; later I extended them in a lecture which I delivered in various centres in Scotland and England, and, finally, I was asked by the late Professor Koelbing of Breslau, the editor of the *Englische Studien*, a German Review for English language and literature of the first rank, to contribute, in English, a series of articles on Stevenson. To these materials, besides corrections and revisions, I have added two chapters on "Stevenson as a Letter-writer," and a final one entitled "Conclusions," none of which have before appeared in print.

Whether in all this there is anything novel or of value, it is not for me to assert or maintain. The just and gentle reader and the discerning critic must decide that for themselves.

It only remains for me heartily to thank Messrs. Macmillan for permission to make use again of the article in *Temple Bar*, and the present Editor and the Publisher of *Englische Studien*, Professor Hoops

of Heidelburg, and Herr O. R. Reisland of Leipzig, respectively, for allowing me to reprint the articles contributed to that Review, so soon after their appearance in Germany.

I would merely add that this *brochure* makes no pretence to be a *Life* of Stevenson; for we all still await an authoritative biography from his cousin, Mr. Graham Balfour.

MURRAYFIELD,
January 1901.

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ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

CHAPTER I

HIS LITERARY ACHIEVEMENT

THIS work originated, as has been stated already in the Preface, in the attempt to compose an introduction to the works of Stevenson, which would impress German readers not only with the beauty and attractiveness of his writings, but with their mass and importance. For, quite rightly, the German students of English literature do not wish to take up their time with an English author who is of only secondary magnitude and importance. Now, I found that the majority of these were very apt to discuss Stevenson as a mere writer of stories of adventure, who was not to be taken seriously as an author. So that I thought that the very first requisite of an introduction under these circumstances was to indicate not only the nature and qualities, but also the range and extent of our author's achievement.

It may well and rightly be urged that in addressing an English-speaking audience, as I now do, such a proceeding is unnecessary. Unnecessary no doubt to a large extent it may be, and yet not inexpedient, for there are no inconsiderable number of persons who know Stevenson well by reputation, and who have

read a few of his most popular books, who would still find it difficult to make out anything like a complete list of his works, and still less arrange them either in correct chronological order or classify them clearly and instructively.

Stevenson himself always found a great fascination in maps and charts, so it is not inappropriate if I commence on my original plan of furnishing the reader with what we may call a sketch-map or chart of Stevenson's literary achievement.

Stevenson died in 1894 at the comparatively early age of forty-four, and, as appears from his posthumous works, in the height and ripeness—if, indeed, even then quite at the acme—of his powers; yet, although all his life more or less of an invalid, and often apparently tottering at the very portals of death, he has left behind him, in the collected and completed Edinburgh Edition of his Works, some twenty-eight volumes, representing at least thirty-five works as originally given to the public. Now, a man, or even a woman, might easily in that time have written twenty-eight or even fifty-eight volumes, all of which the world would willingly and deservedly forget. What, then, is exceptional in these volumes of Stevenson's? They are, in the first instance, the work of one of the most conscientious and exquisite stylists of his own or perhaps any day. What this means in point of labour alone, only an author of equally fine literary conscience can fully realise. But something of the pains which Stevenson bestowed on his work one may judge from the fact, which we have explicitly on his own authority, that in one of his books, "Prince Otto," most of the chapters were written five or six times over, and one nine times. This, no doubt,

was an exception, but it shows the high degree of conscientiousness of the artist in his work, and renders it ground for wonder and admiration that, with such a method, or in spite of such a method, he accomplished so much.

What, then, is the nature of this work?

If we were in the first instance astonished by its quantity, judged by the physical disabilities of the man, we are now amazed by its variety; for it cannot be classified under fewer than seven or eight distinct heads, some of which would even admit of subdivision.

The first class, for instance (named first from their being characteristic of his early period, and also because it is possible that they may eventually—as with many they already do—take precedence of all that follows in permanence of interest), might easily admit of division. I gather, however, here together in one all his Essays and Travels, because they both issue purely from the thought and experience of the man himself and depend for their interest solely on that thought and experience, and on the manner and style in which these are expressed.

Under this head I range the following, with date of appearance in volume form :—

"An Inland Voyage" (1878), "Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes" (1877), "Virginibus Puerisque" (1881), "Familiar Studies of Men and Books" (1882), "The Silverado Squatters" (1883), "Memories and Portraits" (1887), "Across the Plains" (1892), to which we may add "The Amateur Emigrant" and "In the South Seas," first reprinted in the Edinburgh Edition.

In the second class I would place his Short Stories, a branch of art quite distinct from and, by consent, more difficult to excel in than the novel, but in which Stevenson, adding the interest of narrative and character to charm of style, achieved many successes, remaining, indeed, almost without rival in English Literature till the advent of Rudyard Kipling.

The volumes containing these are :—

"New Arabian Nights" (1882), including "The Suicide Club," "The Rajah's Diamond," "A Lodging for the Night," &c. &c.; "More New Arabian Nights; the Dynamiter" (1885), in conjunction with his wife, including "The Squire of Dames," "The Superfluous Mansion," "Narrative of the Spirited Old Lady," &c. &c.; "The Merry Men, and Other Tales" (1886), including "Will o' the Mill," "Markheim," "Thrawn Janet," "The Treasure of Franchard," &c. &c.

Thirdly, we come to his romances or novels, beginning with his world-famous boys' romance "Treasure Island," and ending with the splendid fragment "Weir of Hermiston," and the unfinished but engrossing narrative of "St. Ives." To this class pertain :—

"Treasure Island" (1882), "Prince Otto" (1885), "Kidnapped" (1886), "The Black Arrow" (1888); "The Wrong Box," in conjunction with his stepson, Lloyd Osbourne (1888); "The Master of Ballantrae" (1889), "The Wrecker" (1892), also in conjunction with Lloyd Osbourne; "Catriona" (1893), sequel to "Kidnapped"; "The Ebb-Tide" (1894), also collaborated with Lloyd Osbourne; and, posthumously published, "Weir of Hermiston," unfinished (1896), and "St. Ives" (1897), completed by Mr. Quiller Couch.

We now come to a fourth class which Stevenson himself calls fables, but which are rather stories with a symbolic or allegorical significance superadded. The most charming of these is the "Bottle Imp," and the most famous that appalling parable of our higher and lower nature, "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." These are all to be found either in "Island Nights Entertainments" (1893), or in "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, with other Fables" (1896).

Stevenson never, even in his youth, took himself quite seriously as a poet or verse-writer, but that does not prevent our finding in his writings a fifth class, of poetry, which, if unimportant in comparison with his prose, contains much that is fine, and some, such as his "Child's Garden of Verses" and his South-Sea Ballad, "The Song of Rahéro," which are unique in their different ways.

Not unfrequently, beginning with his earliest publication, the historical tract, "The Pentland Rising," has Stevenson essayed to deal with facts historic or personal, and hence arises another class—even setting aside his historical novels—of history and biography. To this belong the aforesaid "Pentland Rising" (1866), several of his essays, as "John Knox in his Relations to Women," the "Memoir of Fleeming Jenkin" (1887), the unfinished "Family of Engineers" (the Stevensons), and his "Footnote to History"[1] (1893).

[1] This volume had in Germany a brief and unfortunate career. Published in English by Messrs. Tauchnitz, it gave offence to the Government on account of some strictures it contained on certain German officials in Samoa, and brought down on publisher and printer a state prosecution, with the result that Baron Tauchnitz and the printer were sharply fined, and the book proscribed, and,

We may even form a seventh class, that of his dramatic works, such as "Deacon Brodie," "Robert Macaire," "The Hanging Judge," "Admiral Guinea," and "Beau Austin."

His "Vailima Letters" and his "Letters to his Family and Friends" entitle Stevenson also to consideration as a letter-writer.

But most remarkable of all is it, that throughout all these eight categories, unless it be in his professedly dramatic writings, it would be impossible to point to one in which his successes do not outnumber his failures. It would be far juster, indeed, to apply to him the hackneyed, but irreplaceable, classic eulogium, and say he touched nothing he did not adorn. And if we compare him with his contemporaries, even with such great names as Tennyson, Browning, Carlyle, and Ruskin, this versatility gives him a grace and movement which is more taking than the fidelity of these, wrapt ever in their singing robes or prophetic mantles, to one literary domain.

In some respects Stevenson is singular among men of his own literary rank and time, viz. in these, that

people say, burnt. I recall this picturesque incident, because a quite unwarrantable conclusion has been drawn from it, viz. that Stevenson was an enemy of Germany and the Germans. Stevenson was far too much of the cosmopolitan and philosopher to cherish any such narrow aversion. But he was by nature an instinctive foe of officialism as such, and by disposition, character, and circumstance an enthusiastic champion (like Sir George Grey in New Zealand) of the native races; and he was also, as we shall see, a person of no small authority in Samoa. Hence his attack on these officials,—one of them a Swede,—who were eventually removed, can cause no surprise, nor furnish any real ground for attributing to him a prejudice, which his excellent relations with individual Germans in Samoa amply disprove.

in an age when fiction, to which the bulk of his work belongs, is chiefly read and largely produced by women, he is not a woman's writer but a man's, and his appeal among men is to the young rather than the old, and also to the cultured rather than the many. That Stevenson interests women comparatively little is not hard to understand. Burns, as may be remembered, was chiefly proud of his famous battle-song, "Scots wha hae," because, as he said, he had succeeded in writing a lyric that was *not a love-poem*. In prose romance Stevenson constantly emulates this feat, in that he seeks to do without the love-interest; so that in many of his stories that interest is either a-wanting, secondary, or at least ineffective. This ineffectiveness arises from what I might call a want of intimacy in his handling of his female characters, which prevents their taking a strong hold on our interest, or, indeed, being real *creations*, as some of his men certainly are. This applies chiefly, as in the case of Scott, to *ladies*, and more especially to young ones, and in both cases is due, I suspect, to a sort of chivalrous respect for the sanctities of refined womanhood, which keeps the author at too polite a distance from his subject. His women, as a rule, are accessory rather than leading characters, and not, as in Shakespeare, Goethe, and other great writers, the moving springs of the action, or at least the principal axes or pivots about which the main action revolves.

In Stevenson's later work, no doubt, exceptions to this are to be found, especially in "Catriona" and "Weir of Hermiston," in the characters of Miss Grant and Catriona in the one, and of the elder Kirsty in the other.

But some fair objector may say that women do not read a book for the sake of its love-interest or its female characters. As to the first point, I have not the moral courage to argue such a point with a lady, but will merely say that I am not for a moment maintaining that women are not fully alive to many other sources of interest—even in fiction—but that a story without love-interest has the same hold on them as one that possesses it, few, if any, will be bold enough to assert. Then, just as a boy, as a rule, likes stories about boys, a girl about girls, a man about men,—and that because we love to identify ourselves with some character in the books we read,—so a woman naturally prefers books in which her own sex is well represented and well depicted.

No; Stevenson's main appeal is in the first instance to men, especially to young men, and even to boys, although the latter are hardly able to appreciate the finer qualities of his works. These finer qualities, indeed, it requires no small amount of culture to appreciate, and when you find a true Stevensonian you may depend also on finding a foundation of good reading and culture, and a development of the literary sense.

One reason why Stevenson is admired and, one may say, loved by the young[1] is because he is really the champion of youth and, indeed, the Laureate of childhood. This is very marked in his early essays, as in the volume "Virginibus Puerisque," more particularly

[1] A very pretty instance of this occurred to me when I had once in the presence of a young Scotch boy spoken, as he thought, disparagingly of "Treasure Island." He strode up to me with the airs of a young paladin, and, so to speak, flung me down the gauntlet. "It's a fine book!" says he, with the air of Fitz-James defying a Highland clan.

in such essays as "Crabbed Age and Youth," "Child's Play," &c., from the former of which I quote:—

"Nay, by managing its own work and following its own happy inspiration, youth is doing the best it can to endow the leisure of age. A full, busy youth is your only prelude to a self-contained and independent age; the muff inevitably develops into the bore. There are not many Dr. Johnsons to set forth upon their first romantic voyage at sixty-four. If we wish to scale Mont Blanc or visit a thieves' kitchen in the East-End, to go down in a diving-dress or up in a balloon, we must be about it while we are still young. It will not do to delay until we are clogged with prudence and limping with rheumatism, and people begin to ask us, 'What does Gravity out of bed?' Youth is the time to go flashing from one end of the world to the other both in mind and body; to try the manners of various nations; to hear the chimes at midnight; to see sunrise in town and country; to be converted at a revival; to circumnavigate the metaphysics, write halting verses, run a mile to see a fire, and wait all day long in a theatre to applaud *Hernani*. There is some meaning in the old theory of wild oats; and the man who has not had his greensickness and got done with it for good is as little to be relied on as an unvaccinated infant.

. . . . . .

"When the old man waggles his head and says, 'Oh! I thought so when I was your age,' he has proved the youth's case. Doubtless, whether from growth of experience or decline of animal heat, he thinks so no longer. But he thought so when he was

young; and all men have thought so while they were young, since there was dew in the morning and hawthorn in May; and here is another young man adding his vote to those of previous generations and riveting another link to the chain of testimony. It is as natural and as right for a young man to be imprudent and exaggerated, to live in swoops and circles, and beat about his cage like any other wild thing newly captured, as it is for old men to turn grey, or mothers to love their offspring, or heroes to die for something more valuable than their lives."

Stevenson, especially in his earlier books, flies the colours of youth; asserts the right of youth to be young, and even to be foolish, as the old count foolishness; just as the old have the right to be old and to be wise, as the old count wisdom. In his later books, again, he seems inclined to atone for his early partisanship, and appears rather as the apologist and vindicator of age, even in so forbidding a representative as old Weir of Hermiston. Yet Stevenson retains always, as we shall see later, much of the boy and even of the child in his nature.

After striking these few preliminary chords, let us turn to the facts of his life.

CHAPTER II

CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH

ROBERT LOUIS BALFOUR STEVENSON, as his original naming ran, was born on the 13th November 1850, so that his birth may almost be said to mark the first year of the second half of the nineteenth century, a date not without its significance—just a half-century later than that of Heine, to whom he has points of resemblance. For few men have held so high a place or wielded so great an influence on English Literature in the later decades of the nineteenth century. His birth took place in Edinburgh at No. 8 Howard Place, whence his family shortly removed, first to No. 1 Inverleith Terrace, and, later on, to a larger house, No. 17 Heriot Row, where they remained till the death of his father in 1887. Here it was that Stevenson lived when I made his acquaintance at school.

Two other houses, besides those already mentioned, are closely connected with Stevenson's childhood, viz. Swanston Cottage, near the hamlet of that name on the northern slopes of the Pentland Hills near Edinburgh, and Colinton Manse, a little farther to the westward, the residence of his maternal grandfather, an old Scottish Presbyterian minister. Those who know Stevenson's Essays, especially the volume "Memories and Portraits," will have these scenes and their leading characters (the old Scotch gardener, the

shepherd, the old minister, &c.) immortally embalmed for them. Here we have only space for a few lines descriptive of the Manse:—

"It was a place at that time like no other; the garden cut into provinces by a great hedge of beech, and overlooked by the church and the terrace of the churchyard, where the tombstones were thick, and after nightfall 'spunkies'[1] might be seen to dance, at least by children; flower-plots lying warm in sunshine; laurels and the great yew making elsewhere a pleasing horror of shade; the smell of water rising from all round, with an added tang of paper-mills; the sound of water everywhere, and the sound of mills—the wheel and the dam singing their alternate strain; the birds from every bush and from every corner of the overhanging woods pealing out their notes till the air throbbed with them; and in the midst of all this the Manse."

Swanston Cottage and its neighbourhood is also frequently alluded to and described by our author, perhaps most definitely and fully in his latest novel of all, "St. Ives." Of the working of his childish imagination amid these surroundings there is abundant record in his charming "Child's Garden of Verses," as in this poem:—

MY KINGDOM.

Down by a shining water-well
I found a very little dell,
No higher than my head.
The heather and the gorse about
In summer bloom were coming out,
Some yellow and some red.

[1] *Spunkie*, Scottish diminutive from Spunk (= fire) = corpse-light, Jack o' lantern, &c.

I called the little pool a sea,
The little hills were big to me ;
For I am very small.
I made a boat, I made a town,
I searched the caverns up and down,
And named them one and all.

And all about was mine, I said,
The little sparrows overhead,
The little minnows too.
This was the world and I was king
For me the bees came by to sing,
For me the swallows flew.

I played there were no deeper seas
Nor any wider plains than these,
Nor other kings than me.
At last I heard my mother call
Out from the house at evenfall
To call me home to tea.

And I must rise and leave my dell
And leave my dimpled water-well,
And leave my heather-blooms
Alas ! and as my house I neared,
How very large my nurse appeared,
How great and cool the rooms

But before going farther a word about Stevenson's parentage will not come amiss.

He was the only son of Thomas Stevenson, who was the son of Robert Stevenson and brother of David and Alan Stevenson (all of the famous Edinburgh firm of civil engineers), and, through his many and invaluable improvements in the illumination of lighthouses, himself the most famous of the Scottish Stevensons till the advent of his brilliant son. Indeed, as the son himself relates, there were till lately quarters of the globe where the father was still the more famous. Beside

his achievements as an engineer, must be set those of authorship, especially his contributions to the defence of Christianity, which he not only valued highly himself, but which were esteemed by an earnest public and praised by such men as Dr. Hutchison Stirling. Of his character there is a reverent yet finely touched and discriminating sketch by the son in "Memories and Portraits." And it is through this father, strange as it may seem, that Stevenson gets the Celtic elements so marked in his person, character, and genius; for his father's pedigree runs back to the Highland clan Macgregor, the kin of Rob Roy.

Stevenson's mother was Margaret Isabella, youngest daughter of the Rev. James Balfour, minister of Colinton, Midlothian. His grandfather again had been Professor of Moral Philosophy, &c., and his wife was daughter to the Rev. George Smith (referred to in Burns's "Holy Fair"), a woman of uncommon beauty and charm of manner. The Balfour of Burley, so splendidly depicted in Scott's "Old Mortality," was some sort of kin to these Balfours.

Louis—he was never, that I ever heard of, called by his first name—was always a delicate child, and had several illnesses in his youth, notably an attack of gastric fever in 1858, through which he was tenderly nursed by his mother and his nurse, Alison Cunningham, to whom he dedicates his "Child's Garden of Verses." He was specially liable to take cold, and, much as he loved Scotland and even Edinburgh in other respects, he bore a life-long grudge to the climate of his native city—a healthy climate to the robust, indeed, but cruel, especially in Spring with its biting east winds and its mocking, treacherous sunshine, to

the weak. Being an ailing and only child, and his mother being likewise at this time delicate, his regular education was much interrupted from his having to spend his winters and springs abroad or in the south of England. From the ordinary standpoint he was rather a backward child, as he could not read till he was eight years of age. His mother and nurse, however, told and read him countless stories, and the instinct of authorship was early awakened. At the age of six he had dictated to his mother a "History of Moses," founded no doubt on the Bible narrative, but illustrated by himself wth coloured pictures giving a very naïve presentment of the early Israelites, as these were depicted as wearing "cylinder" hats and smoking Dutch pipes. Stevenson showed thus early, and continued throughout his career to show, like Goethe, Thackeray, and other notable writers, an aptitude to express himself not only in words, but also in graphic form, with the pencil as well as with the pen. Indeed, so strong was this tendency in Stevenson, that it was at one time doubtful whether he would not have followed Art rather than Letters as a profession. In the winter number of the *Studio* for 1896–7, two series of reproductions are given, one "Some Lead-pencil Drawings made in the neighbourhood of Monastier, France" (see "Travels with a Donkey"), and the other in an article, "Robert Louis Stevenson, Illustrator," by the well-known artist and author, Joseph Pennell. The latter referred to a series of *jeux d'esprit* published and printed by Stevenson and his son-in-law Osbourne at their private press in Davos Platz. The illustrations are quaint, humorous, and even grotesque, and are much praised by Mr. Pennell for their technical

qualities as woodcuts; and are certainly remarkable for the simplicity of means by which strong effects are produced, the high lights being sharply and trenchantly cut out from a dense black background. Crude and intentionally rough as these curious, white-out-of-black sketches are, they show at least a sense of sound method in the wood-cutter's art and a swift perception of essentials, so that it is hardly too much to say that we read here, almost as readily, some characteristics of the author's method and aims as in a "Master of Ballantrae" or a "Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." Still, there is no cause for regret that Stevenson gave himself to Letters, in so many departments of which he has shown undoubted technical mastery.

In his eighth year, being particularly anxious to read *Cassell's Miscellany*, he rapidly taught himself to read, a piece of self-education which probably accounts for an uncertainty on points of punctuation and even spelling by which he professes himself troubled to the end of his days. For, strange as it may seem to the pedant, a man may be a great writer and yet remain hazy to the last on certain minutiæ of grammar, punctuation, or spelling. Robert Browning, for example, publicly confesses his imperfect education in syntax, which he says was knocked into him "not with hobnails, but tin tacks." The great Sir Walter signalised his secretaryship of the "Speculative Society" in Edinburgh University by invariably spelling Tuesday with *eu*, not to speak of his general slovenliness of style both in prose and verse. I suspect the best prose writers, like poets, write by ear and give in the first instance little thought to spelling or even punctuation, which after all is only an imperfect and approximate

method of indicating grammatical relations or even rhetorical effects.

Like other literary men in their childhood, Stevenson was strongly attracted to the stage, and performed many wonderful and blood-curdling dramas on the boards of his own toy-theatre. I sometimes think that this familiarity with the slaughter of cardboard crews and painted-paper pirates in his youth has something to do with that apparent callousness—not to say gusto—with which Stevenson handles the criminal and sanguinary in his books. The gentle, rather girlish boy who, I am sure, was never responsible for a black eye or bloody nose among his school-fellows, and whose one attempt to play the "big boy" and bully at school was, to my knowledge, one of his failures, seems in private to have sated himself with theatrical and imaginary carnage. It is an element existing in most children, this delight in the horrible, in stories of wild beasts, pirates, cruel giants, wild Indians, and such forbidding agents of death and pain. Such stories are, in a child's phrase I once heard, "awful *and* nice." Their relation produces on the well-cared-for child, safe in its snug nursery, a pleasing thrill of horror, happily compounded of half-belief and half-scepticism. Now, I take it that the love of, or the fascination for, the horrible, which we undoubtedly find exemplified in Stevenson's works, is a trait of childhood which has survived in him far more strongly than with most of us.

Stevenson's first school was Henderson's Preparatory School, Edinburgh (1858–61), whence he proceeded to the famous Edinburgh Academy, where it was found he could not attend regularly enough on account of

his health; and so a boarding-school near London was tried in 1863; but the absence from home did not suit the delicate, sensitive child, and he was again removed and placed under the care of Mr. Robert Thomson, M.A., who kept a small day-school in Frederick Street, Edinburgh, specially designed for backward or delicate boys. Here it was in 1864 that I first met Stevenson, and we were much together till I left for Edinburgh University in the autumn of 1865. Stevenson remained there, I understand, some two years longer, with, as usual with him, frequent absences, caused by illnesses or by his enforced flights sunward and southward.

It was at Mr. Thomson's school that I first saw Robert Louis Stevenson in the flesh—to use a somewhat inappropriate phrase. I do not think there were at this little seminary more than a dozen boys, ranging in ages from nine or ten to fourteen or fifteen, and our intellectual calibre varied fully as much as our years. For some of us were sent there for reasons of health, and others because they had not made that progress with their studies which their fond parents had hoped. Others were there, I fancy, merely because the scheme of education upon which the proprietor, Mr. Robert Thomson, proceeded, fell in with the views of our parents. One feature of this system was that we had no home lessons, but learned, in the two or three hours of afternoon school, what we were expected to remember next day. My impression is, either that Stevenson joined the school later than I did, or that he was absent on one of his frequent health pilgrimages, when I first made the acquaintance of my schoolmates. However, when he did come, being older and somewhat

more advanced than the others, we were naturally drawn much together, and whatever I may have done for him, he certainly played a leading *rôle* for me among this juvenile "cast." Our freedom from home tasks gave us leisure for literary activities, which would otherwise have been tabooed as waste of time. Perhaps with some of us they were, but not with Stevenson. For even then he had—to the grief of his father, if not of both his parents—a fixed idea that literature was his calling, and a marvellously mature conception of the course of self-education through which he required to put himself in order to succeed. Among other things, we were encouraged to make verse-translations, and, for some reason or other, I specially well remember a passage of Ovid, which he rendered in Scott-like octosyllabics, and I in heroic couplets, which I probably thought commendably like those of Mr. Pope. But, even then, Stevenson showed impatience of the trammels of verse, and longed for the compass and ductility of prose.

At school Stevenson was a quick and bright but somewhat desultory scholar, and never—being encouraged in this position by his father—strove after distinction in his class. Nor was he wanting in liking or ability for his tasks, and at any rate French, Latin, and Geometry were interesting and congenial studies to him. In Greek I doubt if he ever got very far, certainly never the length of reading the original with ease and pleasure. In French he had the advantage of having been a good deal in the country, and already appreciated some of the beauties of French prose. Latin he enjoyed also from a literary and stylistic point of view, and some of the care and finish of his style and its fre-

quent felicities may be traced back to his early love for Cicero and Horace, Ovid and Virgil.[1] But he was already full of his own literary projects and activities, and we took, I fancy, a keener interest in the school magazine (beginning modestly and dubiously under the title of "The Trial," to blossom forth later into the avowedly romantic "Jack o' Lantern") than in our more regular and legitimate studies. That we were rather ambitious is witnessed by the fact that we must needs run *two* serial stories abreast. One of these Stevenson wrote himself, while he and I collaborated over the other. He suggested and discussed with me the plot, which was of true Stevensonian type, and was laid in the tropical island of Jamaica, and I wrote up the details (including a monstrous Negro of colossal villainy, with his headquarters in an appropriately horrible and inaccessible Cavern) with such unfortunate vividness and effect that the story was speedily proscribed by my parents as *sensational*, and either remained a *torso*, to use a fine phrase, or was finished single-handed by Stevenson himself.

Stevenson calls himself "ugly" in his student days, but I think that is a term that never at any time fitted him. Certainly to him as a boy about fourteen (with the creed which he propounded to me, that at sixteen one was a man) it would not apply. In body Stevenson was assuredly badly set up. His limbs were long and lean and spidery, and his chest flat, so as almost to suggest some malnutrition, such sharp angles and corners did his joints make under his clothes. But in his

[1] I do not think he was learning German when at school with me, but I understand he learnt it later on, but never had the same familiarity and mastery of it that he had of French.

face this was belied. His brow was oval and full, over soft brown eyes, that seemed already to have drunk the sunlight under southern vines. The whole face had a tendency to an oval Madonna-like type. But about the mouth and in the mirthful, mocking light of the eyes, there lingered ever a ready Autolycus roguery, that rather suggested the sly god Hermes masquerading as a mortal. Yet the eyes were always genial, however gaily the lights danced in them; but about the mouth there was something tricksy and mocking, as of a spirit that had already peeped behind the scenes of Life's pageant and more than guessed its unrealities.

I would now give much to possess but one of Stevenson's gifts—namely, that extraordinary vividness of recollection by which he could so astonishingly recall, not only the doings, but the very thoughts and emotions of his youth. For, often as we must have communed together, with all the shameless candour of boys, hardly any remark of his has stuck to me except the opinion already alluded to, which struck me—his elder by some fifteen months—as very amusing, that "at sixteen we should be men." He of all mortals, who was, in a sense, always still a boy! Nor can I recall any special incidents beyond the episode of the school-magazine, already alluded to in the *Daily News* for December 19, 1894. He and my other schoolmates were, I fancy, pretty often at my house, which, being in the country, was more attractive on holidays than their town houses. I was not very often in 17 Heriot Row, and I had a notion then, of which I have never been disabused, that I was not a *persona grata* to Stevenson *père* on account of my being an art-and-part accomplice in his son's literary

schemes and ambitions. Mrs. Stevenson was always kind and gracious, but, in spite of that, I always felt rather like a bale of contraband goods, as I passed in at the door of No. 17, and followed Stevenson to his den in the attic story. One of these occasions I do distinctly remember, on which Stevenson was brimful of the story of "Deacon Brodie," and I believe he then read to me, probably in 1864, portions of a proposed drama on the subject.

On the other hand, our house, Duncliffe, Murrayfield, seemed to have taken his romantic fancy, and in one of his short stories, "The Misadventures of John Nicholson," it is powerfully and, in the main, accurately described, in its very gloomiest aspect, as the scene of a murder, so vividly portrayed that I cannot think of it without seeing the dead body lying in a certain position on the dining-room floor.

This house, once the residence of Mrs. Fletcher of Saltoun, and once during my father's ownership in the tenancy of Sir David Brewster, is no longer to be seen as Stevenson saw it, having lately passed to a new owner, whose extensive alterations have completely changed the individuality of the house, and doubtless scared any haunting spirits, literary or historic, that clung about its walls. But some of the old hollies and laurels may yet glisten on winter nights as they glisten still in the candlelight of Stevenson's vivid, if gruesome, pages.

In one of my last letters to Stevenson, I demanded of him that he should return from Samoa and remove the dead body he had incontinently left on the premises, and I am told he was vastly tickled by the idea.

I have only so far come upon two specimens of

Stevenson's literary work at that early age—one a rhyming letter he wrote in reply to one I had sent him embodying the regrets of his schoolmates at his absence in Torquay, and the other, an imperfect and much-corrected-and-altered draft of a romantic ballad of the "Baron of Manaheit." Of the (intentional) doggerel of the letter, the following lines are an amusing specimen, and are not without a hint of that playful humour which became one of his finest and most fascinating qualities:—

> "E'er since I left
> Of friends bereft
> I've pined in melancholly,
> And all Torquay
> Its rocks and sea
> Have witnessèd my folly.
> I do not say
> That all the day
> I weep and pine in grief,
> But now and then
> I say again
> The greek for 'stop the thief!'"

I intentionally preserve the slip in spelling and the lacking capital as characteristic of schoolboy haste and carelessness. I do not now remember what is the Greek for "Stop the thief!" but have no doubt it was a fine mouth-filling phrase with probably an exhilarating suggestion of profanity. It may indeed encourage the juvenile literary aspirant to know that precocity in the matter of correct spelling is evidently not a *sine quâ non* of ultimate success in letters. The ballad was probably written for the "Jack o' Lantern," but 'twas hardly in a state for publication even there, in spite of the amount of "elbow grease" to which it

has obviously been subjected. It opens characteristically with a description of a haunted house:—

> "The moon shone down from the black arch of night,
> And showed a house close by the public way."
>
> . . . . . .

The remainder of the verse cannot in fairness (even to an author of thirteen) be given, as there are in the final line two qualifying epithets to one noun, both of which have been struck out as unsatisfactory by the already fastidious self-critic. The *dénouement* is the death of the young Baron of Manaheit, in the attempt to defy prophecy, and is described with a certain promise of Stevenson's force and dramatic power:—

> "He gasped, he struggled, then, *with hands on high*,
> Gave one loud shriek and from his saddle dropped."

But there is no sign in these early attempts of anything really premature or precocious, and nothing can be truer, in spite of his early bent towards letters, than that his success was the fruit, as he himself alleges, of persistent industry and indefatigable perseverance; and when we consider that all this was accomplished in the face of much discountenance and opposition, and despite all the drawbacks of physical weakness and almost continuous delicacy and ill-health, Stevenson's achievement in literature must seem nothing short of heroic. And when we remember that he died hard at work, too hard I fear, in the harness he had so resolutely buckled on, we may well declare that the Carlyle of the future will not have far to seek for a "Hero as Man of Letters."

In the autumn of 1865, while I proceeded to matriculate at the University of Edinburgh, Stevenson

remained behind, partly, I believe, continuing his schooling and partly making, as it were, experiments in following his father's profession; and so it came about that he followed me to the University some three years later, and we thus belonged to quite different generations of undergraduate life and moved in different sets. But I fancy we should have seen more of each other had it not been that our boyish friendship was thrown somewhat out of gear by a crisis in my own inner history, chiefly induced, I believe, by a perusal of Pascal's *Pensées*, which resulted in a period of religious depression—as I regard it now—which must have made me poor company for any one, but most of all for this bright elastic hedonist, the truant, life-loving student, diligent in all studies but those prescribed for him. So there appears to me at this time a yawning gap in our intercourse which must have extended over several years, further accounted for by the fact that while he was at Edinburgh University I was mainly in Cambridge. Then he had, in those days, also to take swallow-flights southward in search of warmth and sunshine. But somehow, I recollect not how, our friendship became renewed, and on some bright day when the Edinburgh climate was gracious for a time, he would pounce on me and carry me off to some snug wind-sheltered seat in the Princes Street Gardens, and in pleasant fraternal converse we would report ourselves to each other and exchange mental electricities. When we had, so to speak, squared our mental accounts, or my duties recalled me, we would part, probably for months, till his cometary track again came into conjunction with my prosaic orbit, and he pounced on me for another day of reckoning. But gradually

as his wanderings extended and his absences from Scotland grew in duration, his visits became more angelic in their infrequency; the last I remember was after his marriage, and I saw Mrs. Stevenson at a little distance, but was not introduced to her.

But I think I may say this curious fragmentary friendship maintained a wonderful warmth, not only on my part but on his. My love and admiration were doubtless fed continually by his books, and especially his essays, in which I always felt the true Stevenson, and which brought to me so completely his presence, his voice and smile, that my friend seemed ever at my elbow, ready to discourse in his best manner, his happiest vein. So even when the news of his death came, I did not feel it as a remote event, but rather as though a comrade in arms were shot down by one's side.

A renewal of our intercourse came about rather curiously, from his instructing his publishers, Messrs. Chatto & Windus, to send me a copy of the volume entitled "Ballads," a form of compliment he had never before paid me. This naturally led to my writing to him, and this to a project that I should visit him in Samoa: a project, alas! never, to my infinite regret, carried out; the fault being my own, as was the misfortune. But it led to my receiving letters from him, which are naturally very precious possessions now. They are in the old vein of frank friendship, disengaged and manly, but breathing of that fine *camaraderie* of which he and Whitman, of all moderns, most possessed the secret. I had spoken warmly of the "Ballads," which the public, it seems, would have none of, and especially the "Song of Rahero," which I regard as his highest achievement in verse, and he writes:—

"They [the 'Ballads'] failed to entertain a coy public, at which I wondered, not that I set much account by my verses, which are the verses of Prosator; but I do know how to tell a yarn, and two of the yarns are great. 'Rahero' is for its length a perfect folk-tale; savage and yet fine, full of tail-foremost morality, ancient as the granite rocks; if the historian, not to say the politician, could get that yarn into his head, he would have learned some of his A B C. But the average man at home cannot understand antiquity; he is sunk over the ears in Roman civilisation; and a tale like that of 'Rahero' falls on his ears inarticulate. The *Spectator* said there was no psychology in it; that interested me much; my grandmother (as I used to call that able paper, and an able paper it is, and a fair one) cannot so much as observe the existence of savage psychology when it is put before it. I am at bottom a psychologist, and ashamed of it; the tale seized me one-third because of its picturesque features, two-thirds because of its astonishing psychology, and the *Spectator* says there's none. I am going on with a lot of island work, exulting in the knowledge of a new world, 'a new created world' and new men; and I am sure my income will DECLINE and FALL off; for the effort of comprehension is death to the intelligent public, and sickness to the dull."

Everything he here says points to a remarkably sane and true estimate of his own powers, and I do not think I ever met or read of a man of letters or genius of any kind more genuinely modest than Stevenson. His ideal was high, and he seldom altogether pleased himself; so he was apt rather to disparage too much those of his efforts which failed of his severe

standard of achievement. He put me off reading one of his volumes for years, because he described it as composed of pot-boilers or some such phrase. When I came to read it I saw well enough what made him utter this libel on himself. The work was not of his best, perhaps somewhat tentative; but there were touches of the master of story-telling—a charm and force of style he could not divest himself of. As a rule he was, in a degree very rare among artistic natures, more severe and sternly just to his own work than any of his critics: indeed, he sometimes treated his own offspring with a truculent severity worthy of a Roman father, or of his favourite, Lord Braxfield.[1] Few men, I am convinced, have on any score treated themselves to more brutal frankness. Still, when he had done what he thought was good work, he was minded to stick loyally by it, and valiantly maintain his position, whether against the slights of a fickle, dull-scented public, or the onslaught of critics.

When we come to judge of Stevenson's career, and especially his conduct of life, and more particularly when the fascinating autobiography we find in his books is supplemented by a biography indited by loving and sympathetic hands, we must always bear in mind the peculiarity of his ethical standards. He had early revolted against the grim rule of mingled Calvinism and Puritanism, behind which (in spite of the heroic purity of many) lurks, as behind a grim mask, much unlovely evil in Scottish character. To his supple, artistic, and perhaps somewhat Gallicised nature, with its unconquerable Bohemianism, the grim, granite face

[1] The original of Weir of Hermiston the elder.

of Scottish piety was repellent, and it does not require the record of his converse with the Trappists to apprise us that in a clime whose religion is more indulgent to human frailties and less divorced from the beautiful, his early life might have taken on more colour of piety in the ordinary sense.

In spite of the childish piety on which he seems to me to plume himself rather unnecessarily, the religious world, as he found it, revolted him by its harshness and moral pedantry, which too often but skinned over characters full of dishonesty, selfishness, and even impurity. But his nature was not exactly of the religious type; he was tender rather than reverent, sympathetic and indulgent rather than austerely virtuous; the human was more to him than the divine. Yet he was ever on the road to true piety by the route indicated in St. John's Epistles—the love of his brother; but his code is not a little heathen. Like Heine, he is a Hellenist, not a Hebraist, more anxious and appreciative of graciousness and grace of bearing and conduct than of strict conformity to set rules of virtue or morals. Of all rule and convention, indeed, he was the sworn foe; virtue itself only charms him when growing wild. Of the drudgery of labour at set times and places, of the compliance with civilised routine and fashion, he was fully as incapable as Hottentot or Red Indian. He loved to plunge into vagrancy, into the lower strata of society, into the company of the huddled and hustled emigrant, or the companionship of primitive and savage peoples; anywhere, indeed, where he could purge himself of that middle-class respectability that so stank in his nostrils.

He had a true child's horror of being put into fine clothes, in which one must "sit still and be good." I fancy he modestly disclaimed the pretension to be good in the ordinary acceptation; yet he has his own rather exacting standards for human action. He is austere with Robert Burns, and when he writes of Villon, we feel he is suffocating with moral nausea. Neither of them reaches his notion of manly conduct. He cannot forgive the village Don Juan that Scotland delights to honour as though he had been a saint; he cannot stomach the sordid envy or the vile complacencies of Villon. Yet, another kind of bad character he can be indulgent enough to is his own "Master of Ballantrae," perhaps the most unmitigated and accomplished scoundrel in fiction, and he leaves him with the tragic honours of the story, while the poor, worthy, long-suffering brother sinks into a despicable sot.

Stevenson's moral judgments were guided more by what may be called the *poetic* or *absolute* ethic than by that practical ethic which society, rather than the best impulses of our nature, imposes. Now, in the poetic scale of virtues a high place, if not the highest, is always allotted to *courage*, and that absolutely and independently of the cause in which it is displayed. Courage as courage is morally beautiful, however inconvenient it may be to the authorities. Hence the highwayman, the brigand, and the buccaneer always appeal to us, however dark their deeds may be; but let them flinch or play the poltroon, and we are done with them. Love, again, is a true poet's virtue, and wherever we are convinced that the love is genuine, we are all, I fear, very willing to lend a hand in pitch-

ing the Decalogue overboard. So we might proceed to make a list of these romantic and poetic virtues and their more prosaic counterparts, as generosity and prudence, charity and circumspection, impulsiveness and caution, passion and the wisdom that is "aye sae cauld," and we should find Stevenson leaning to the former rather than the latter. But this is perhaps more *à propos* of his art than his life.

CHAPTER III

STUDENT, ADVOCATE, AND AUTHOR

THERE was always in Stevenson a great deal of the Bohemian in a rather innocent sense and even of the *Stürmer-und-Dränger*, so that, while listening some year or two ago to lectures in a Freiburg university on the young Goethe, I was frequently reminded of my friend Stevenson. His father and mother, for instance, present something of a parallel case to that of Goethe's parents; and he had consequently a similar struggle, before he was allowed to follow out as a profession his chosen and proper career. Then Stevenson, although originally designed by his father for his own business of marine engineer, eventually, like Goethe, studied law, and indeed practised for a short time as an advocate at the Scottish Bar in Edinburgh. He had, like Goethe and the other *Stürmer-und-Dränger*, an intense dislike to any fixed industry, and especially to anything of the nature of office work. But in contrast to Goethe, on the other hand, Stevenson was but little affected by his relations to women, and, when this point is fully gone into, it will probably be found that his mother and nurse in childhood, and his wife and step-daughter in later life, are about the only women who seriously influenced either his character or his art.

Stevenson's father was no despiser of literature, but he was anxious that his son should not take to it

as a profession, but keep it as a hobby for his leisure; and this attitude of his is well attested by the fact that Stevenson's first printed publication was produced at the father's instance and expense. This was the short historical tract or sketch depicting an unsuccessful revolt of the Scottish Covenanters, which goes by the name of "The Pentland Rising." This *brochure*, which was probably part of a "Covenanting novel," of which we shall hear later, was remarkable alike for its maturity and its promise. It is now extremely rare and much sought after by collectors, having on one occasion fetched more than three times its own weight in gold. This is, of course, no proof of literary merit, but only a sign of the fervour of the Stevenson cult. The pamphlet is also an historical curiosity, being issued in the bicentenary year of the ill-starred Rising itself, *i.e.* in 1866.

Of Stevenson's attitude towards his father's profession, about two years later, we gather the best idea from these words of his own in an essay called "Random Memories" (see "Across the Plains"):—

"Anstruther," he writes, "is a place sacred to the Muse; she inspired (really to a considerable extent) Tennant's vernacular poem of 'Anster Fair'; and I have waited upon her there myself with much devotion. This was when I came as a young man to glean engineering experience from the building of a breakwater. What I gleaned I am sure I don't know; but indeed I had already my own private determination to be an author; I loved the art of words and the appearances of life, and 'travellers' and 'headers' and 'rubble' and 'polished ashlar' and '*pierres perdues*,' and even the thrilling question of the 'string-course,' interested

me only (if they interested me at all) as properties for some possible romance, or as words to add to my vocabulary. To grow a little catholic is the compensation of years; youth is one-eyed; and in those days, though I haunted the breakwater by day, and even loved the place for the sake of the sunshine, the thrilling seaside air, the wash of the waves on the sea-face, the green glimmer of the diver's helmet far below, and the musical clinking of the masons, my one genuine preoccupation lay elsewhere, and my only industry was in the hours when I was not on duty. I lodged with a certain Bailie Brown, a carpenter by trade; and there, as soon as dinner was despatched, in a chamber scented with dry rose-leaves, drew in my chair to the table and proceeded to pour forth literature, at such a speed, and with such intimations of early death and immortality, as I now look back upon with wonder. There it was I wrote *Voces Fidelium*, a series of dramatic monologues in verse; there that I indited the bulk of a Covenanting novel [see above]—like so many others, never finished."

No trace is to be found, I believe, of either the Covenanting novel or *Voces Fidelium*, and although we can hardly but commend the wisdom of an author who puts his crude and tentative productions out of the reach of misguided admirers, still, the biographer must lament the loss of material that would have helped to throw light on this stage of the author's progress and development.

Long before this, however, in spite of the flirtations with the Muses here indicated, had Stevenson definitely selected prose as his vehicle rather than verse, and set about the formation of a prose style. To this he schooled himself with rigour and perseverance, carrying

about with him constantly pencil notebooks, in which he wrote down favourite passages from the authors whose style he admired, and his own attempts in emulation of them. Invalid and almost weakling as he was physically, he owes his success greatly to sheer hard work, or, as he puts it himself, to "elbow-grease"; and he says, with a curious mixture of humility and self-satisfaction, he believes he had made more of his original talents, such as they were, than any of his contemporaries had of theirs. I may perhaps be indeed excused, as it is so characteristic of this mixture of humility and self-confidence, quoting his judgment on myself when we were boys together. He said to his mother, "There's a fellow at school who has more ability than I have, *but he does not know how to use it.*" However mistaken was the first part of this opinion—and it is characteristic of Stevenson to over-estimate his friends and literary contemporaries—the second seems partly true, at least when compared with Stevenson's own shrewd self-judgment and its brilliant results. In choosing prose, no doubt Stevenson chose a more hopeful and promising medium than verse, and, with his marvellous prescience, he perhaps foresaw the coming predominance of prose fiction, and the even unusual odds against which for the last fifteen or twenty years a verse-writer has had to contend. Nothing better exemplifies this than the limited circulation of Stevenson's own verse compared with his prose.

Both during the time that he was making trial of the engineering business, and later, when he had decided to become an advocate, he had enrolled himself and paid class-fees at the University of Edinburgh. At the classes of the Professors he was (according to his

own account, probably in his usual mischievous spirit somewhat exaggerated) "conspicuous by his absence." The story goes that when he applied to a certain Professor for a certificate of attendance, the Professor declared he had never set eyes on him before. This, Stevenson had to admit, was highly probable, but so ingeniously and winningly did he plead his case that he did not leave without the required signature. He seems, indeed, to have found more interesting subjects of study outside the University curriculum than within it, and to have preferred the society of gay, brilliant, and, I fear, not always very steady companions, to the grave themes of the Professors, or even the time-honoured professorial jokes with which a Scotch Professor is wont to delight successive generations of students.

The following description of our author at this period is quoted from "Robert Louis Stevenson; a Reminiscence," by Charles Lowe, in the *Bookman*, November 1891:—

"His whole appearance was much more indicative of the poet or æsthete than of the scientist, and yet here was this attractive youth tapping my shoulder in one of the front benches of the Mathematical class-room. . . . From the Mathematical class-room we hastened to repair to the privacy of a snug house of entertainment close by, called 'the Pump,' there to continue our discussion over Edinburgh ale and cold-meat pies, and I cannot remember that I ever spent a more pleasant or, indeed, a more inspiring hour in Auld Reekie than the first one I thus passed with Stevenson. From that single hour's conversation with the embryo author of 'Treasure Island,' I certainly

derived more intellectual and personal stimulus than ever was imparted to me by any six months' course of lectures within the walls of 'good King James's College.' He was so perfectly frank and ingenuous, so ebullient and open-hearted, so sunny, so sparkling, so confiding, so vaulting in his literary ambitions, and withal so widely read and well informed—notwithstanding his youth, for he could scarcely have been out of his teens—that I could not help saying to myself that here was a young man who had commended himself more to my approval and emulation than any other of my fellow-students."

These few lines of self-delineation refer to about the same period of his development:—

"He was of a conversable temper, and insatiably curious in the aspects of life, and spent much of his time scraping acquaintance with all sorts of men and women kind."

That he was not, on the other hand, without gifts in the direction of his father's department of work is shown by his being awarded a Silver Medal by the Scottish Society of Arts in 1871 for "Suggested Improvements in Lighthouse Apparatus;" and one of his best and most intimate friends of this and later years was the highly gifted Henry Charles Fleeming Jenkin, Professor of Engineering, who among his other genial gifts possessed that of being an excellent amateur actor. In the theatrical entertainments that were frequent at his house, Stevenson took part, but without distinguishing himself.

At the same time, it is no use denying the fact that during these days Stevenson's mode of life gave his parents genuine grounds for anxiety, and in one of

his last letters to me he points out the very spot where he had his most critical encounter with the tempter, from which he issued victorious. He had a notion, which seems to have haunted him, half as a pride and pleasure, half as a fate and terror, that he closely resembled Robert Fergusson, whom we may call the Scottish Chatterton, who "perished ere his prime," dying in a madhouse before completing his twenty-fourth year. Like Stevenson, Fergusson was naturally slight and delicate, and no doubt hastened his sad end by indiscretions of living, which would hardly have affected one of more sound and robust physique. When Stevenson felt himself treading the same perilous path, Fergusson seems to have appeared as a warning phantom motioning him back. He certainly had some experience of what is sometimes called "Life," and was familiar with haunts known only, in respectable Edinburgh, to the initiated. That he thus "sowed his wild oats," or, in his own phrase, passed through his "greensickness," seems clear enough and, without committing ourselves to his position on this point, it may at least be said that the critical point in all such cases seems to be, not whether a man falls into certain follies, or, if you like, sins, for a time, but whether he has the force of character, like Prince Hal, to cast them behind him and play the man when his call comes. That Stevenson himself had this manhood admits, I think, of no doubt. His relations to women were, for example, never those of a Burns, a Byron, or a Heine; nor had he in this direction the same tempestuous ungovernable passion, or at least the insatiable longing for the companionship and intimacy with the other sex which characterised these three, not to

name others. If his art suffered from his virtue in this respect, his character remained the purer and nobler. Indeed, to anticipate for a moment, if we set aside as inapplicable the standards of the prude and the purist, there can be no doubt that, regarded humanly, honestly, and fairly, Stevenson can be called nothing less than a *good man.*

Stevenson's University career had two periods, in the first of which he was still heading ostensibly in the direction of Engineering, and the second, in which, with his father's consent, he took up the study of Law with the object of becoming a member of the Scottish Bar. This he accomplished, and in 1875, eight years after he first matriculated, he was, as it is termed, "called to the Bar." As an advocate he had no success, for after walking the floor of the Parliament House, as it is called in Edinburgh, along with other briefed and briefless advocates, and securing only one case, which brought him a fee of four guineas, he abandoned that practice and settled down seriously to his true life-work of literature.

Already in 1873 had appeared Stevenson's first contribution to regular periodical literature—a paper on "Roads" in the December number of the *Portfolio*, edited by Mr. P. G. Hamerton, a consistent friend and admirer of Stevenson. But the first I personally remember was the beautiful and pathetic "Ordered South" (*Macmillan's Magazine*, May 1874), occasioned by a serious breakdown in his health, which sent him to the Riviera—chiefly Mentone—for that winter. But already he was in the habit of making frequent excursions in Scotland, England, and abroad, as Frankfort, the Black Forest, and Normandy in 1872, the

Western Isles (Scotland), Chester, Wales, and Buckinghamshire in 1874.

"Now in 1875," writes Mr. Colvin, "began the first series of visits to the artistic settlements in the neighbourhood of Fontainebleau, where his cousin, Mr. R. A. M. Stevenson, was for the time established. He found the forest climate restorative to his health, and the life and company of Barbizon and the other student resorts congenial. Their effects on his mind and talent can be gathered from the essays, 'Forest Notes,' 'Village Communities of Painters,' and the tales, 'Providence and the Guitar,' the 'Treasure of Franchard,' and the early chapters of 'The Wrecker.'" His other haunts about this time were, his home, in Edinburgh or at Swanston, in London, mostly at the Savile Club, and in Cambridge. He was soon on terms of friendship with such men as Leslie Stephen (then editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*), James Payn, Dr. Appleton (editor of the *Academy*), Professor Clifford, Walter Pollock, Egmont Hake, Cosmo Monkhouse, Andrew Lang, and Edmund Gosse; and, a little later, at Burford Bridge, with George Meredith, for whom he cherished a warm admiration. It was in company with Sir Walter Simpson, son of the world-famous promulgator of chloroform, that Stevenson made his canoe-trip in Belgium and France in 1876, which resulted in the production of his first printed book, "An Inland Voyage." Two years later he spent a month at Monastier in Velay, and took the memorable walk with his donkey and sleeping-sack, so delightfully and humorously recorded in "Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes," which, following on his "Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh," formed his third

published volume. In the meantime he was contributing essays and stories to several magazines, and especially to *Cornhill*, where they appeared merely designated by his initials, which by some were taken for those of the editor. How distinctive and personal his style already was may be guessed from the fact that I could always recognise it from the first paragraph, and never recollect being at fault. One might almost define Stevenson's style in his essays by calling him a prose Horace, for to Horace has been attributed the quality of a *curiosa felicitas*, and in Stevenson these singular felicities of phrase are very numerous and striking. But perhaps a still greater charm than this is the sense of personal frankness and intimacy his writings convey to the reader. We do not conceive of the author as addressing us from the vantage-ground of platform or pulpit, or even seriously labouring at his desk; we seem rather to be seated beside him listening to his ripple of talk in the winter sunshine of Davos or Mentone, or drawing in our chairs round a steaming punch-bowl in some snug inn-parlour, while his fancies disengage themselves as freely and naturally as the rings and ringlets of cigarette smoke follow each other upward from his lips. Stevenson had, in fact, thus early acquired, what some writers never attain to —the art of conveying his personality, and that an interesting, picturesque, and inviting one, to his readers. Hence it comes that no writer since Dickens has engaged the affections of his readers like Stevenson; in fact, when we consider how many hundreds of thousands, in Great Britain and America alone, had acquired this warm regard for him, and how much he was esteemed and loved by the natives of Samoa, where he spent his

last years, and where he died and laid his bones, one inclines to believe that few of his contemporaries had possessed themselves of so large a share of the affections of the human race.

About the same time as he was producing the kind of work we have classed together as Essays and Travels, he was also appearing as an author of our second class, viz. "Short Stories." The very earliest of these were "A Lodging for the Night" in *Temple Bar*, October 1877, "The Sire de Malétroit's Door" in the same magazine for January 1878, and "Will o' the Mill" in *Cornhill Magazine* for the same month. There could be no doubt with the discerning reader of these finely touched and at once vivid and delicately drawn stories that here was a domain in which Stevenson was also a master, and, indeed, he himself never excelled these early efforts. "Will o' the Mill" was, as I know from his own lips, that which he set most store by, and we cannot wonder. It sets forth with idyllic beauty one side of his curious doctrine of life's vanity which lies behind and alternates with an almost feverish zest and appetite for living. Later in life, when his cousin, Graham Balfour, praised Will's philosophy, Stevenson repudiated it. It is not his whole philosophy certainly, but it is a side, a phase, a pole of it.

So Stevenson worked on, ever gathering ardent admirers of the most covetable sort, but hardly cutting skin-deep into the insensitive hide of the "general reader." That was to come later, and in the meanwhile he "made salt to his kail," as the Scotch saying goes, —that is, he began partially to support himself by his pen. His name brought a certain blandness to the editorial temper, and, like an accomplished burglar,

he was able to approach the publisher's "bulldog" without fear. Matters were to go yet more smoothly later on, but in the meantime it was in his life that a new element appeared. It was an element of passion, or at least of strong attraction and attachment.

CHAPTER IV

LOVE, MARRIAGE, AND AFTER

In France, about the year 1878, Stevenson met an American lady, Mrs. Osbourne (*née* Van de Grift), who, having left an uncongenial husband in California, was living with her son and daughter "in the art-student circles of Paris and Fontainebleau." There can be no doubt the attachment formed was strong on both sides, and the desire for each other's society one not readily put aside.

This is the first and only time that we find the master-passion of love closing its Titan grip fairly upon Stevenson. Hitherto his friends had been accustomed to twit him on his ignorance of what our old gardener used to call "the female world." Not exactly a St. Anthony, his incursions into the Venusberg had been rather of the nature of light-hearted forays than serious invasions—wanton Jameson raids into a country he was later seriously and successfully to attack. It is said of the diseases of childhood and youth that if they are not passed through in their proper season they are sure to attack us with greater virulence later on. When our first grand passion is for a nursemaid or governess, or a feminine contemporary in short curls and frocks, we probably undergo a kind of innoculation which attenuates the virus and leads to a partial immunity. But when this infant vaccination

has never "taken," and the true disease attacks us as we near the thirties, then is the patient's condition perilous indeed. This, I have no doubt, was Stevenson's case, and the accumulated fuel and explosives in his nature, so to speak, were fired, as by a second Helen, and sent up in a hot conflagration. To put the matter in plain prose, although it is abundantly evident from the sequel that the attachment was rooted in sincere esteem, genuine affection, strong congeniality, and profound admiration and sympathy on both sides, it had also on both sides the elements of what we call a grand passion. It was, in a word, an attachment in which the whole nature of each participant was wholly engaged. This at anyrate is the reading I have been constrained, on good evidence, to put upon this central and vital episode in Stevenson's career, and it is, I believe, the only one which will enable us to judge fairly and justly of this important passage in his life.

For any more detailed and authentic treatment of this portion of Stevenson's biography, we must await, as we all do, not without impatience, the appearance of that official "Life," now in course of preparation by his cousin, Mr. Graham Balfour. But it may be here appropriately remarked that, so far as I can gather, one of the traits which Mrs. Osbourne (as she then was) and Stevenson had in common was a contempt and disregard of everything which savoured of conventionality or conformity, and that, meeting as they did in the midst of one of the most thoroughly Bohemian societies in the art-settlement of Fontainebleau, it is not likely they would be very careful to consider appearances.

The next movement in the drama was the departure of Mrs. Osbourne for America, either accompanied or closely followed by Stevenson, who travelled steerage in an emigrant ship, partly for economy and partly for the sake of the novel experience. For it is evident by this time that Stevenson's family had knowledge of his attachment to Mrs. Osbourne, and probably also of his intention to marry her, when existing obstacles were removed. This, not unnaturally perhaps, met with the strong disapproval of his parents, and, money supplies being cut off at the paternal main, he was left to support himself entirely by his own exertions. This, in a strange land—for he was by this time settled at or near San Francisco—was no easy matter. The editors and journalists of a country which is now only second—if indeed second—to this country in its appreciation of Stevenson, saw then in his articles no beauty that they should desire them for their columns. As so well described by himself in a letter which I quote later on, he now struggled, with great frugality, to maintain himself, and valiantly succeeded. This brave attempt, however, seems to have culminated, as might have been anticipated, in a severe illness, which but for the faithful and constant nursing of Mrs. Osbourne would probably have terminated fatally. Soon after this, Mrs. Osbourne, having obtained a decree of divorce against her husband, was married to Stevenson, who took over what is sometimes called "an incumbrance" in the shape of young Lloyd Osbourne, then quite a lad, between whom and Stevenson there had always existed the warmest affection. Mrs. Osbourne's daughter, the Bell of the "Vailima Letters," was

already married to a Mr. Strong, whom she had presented with the little Gerald, who was to be later on the delight and playmate, and, eventually, *ultimus heres* of his step-grandfather.

So Stevenson married, not his own grandmother but some one else's, a slight concession to convention which the most emancipated reader will probably excuse. This naturally leads us to look upon Mrs. Osbourne as being very much Stevenson's senior. This was, however, not the case to the extent one would naturally imagine. Both Mrs. Osbourne and her daughter were married in their teens, and consequently the space between the two generations was very short. Still Mrs. Stevenson was the elder of the two, probably by about ten years.

The marriage took place in the spring of 1880, and by August of the same year—his friends having reconciled themselves to the match—he brought his wife home to Scotland, and presented her to them. The meeting seems to have had the happiest results, and, so far as one can possibly gather, no cloud ever afterwards darkened the love and confidence that now prevailed betwixt Stevenson and his parents. Especially, contrary to what some might have feared, did Stevenson the elder at once "take to" his son's wife, so that they became and remained excellent friends till the old man's death.

The reader will naturally be laudably curious to know what manner of woman our hero—for a kind of hero Stevenson must always be to any one who has once been his friend—married, and what were the special attractions which kindled so great and lasting a love and passion. I can gratify this laudable curiosity but

little, as I saw Mrs. Stevenson the younger but once, and that at some distance. I saw only a swart little American lady, in a carriage standing at the door of 17 Heriot Row, distinctly American in *coiffure* and dress. I should have judged her for a Southerner from the almost Indian darkness of her complexion, but could note nothing further. So far as I can gather from descriptions, photographs, &c., her attraction lay not in any strict or regular beauty of feature, but rather in a magnetic force and fire, which, for want of a better phrase, we call mesmeric. The Samoans, very subject to such influences, stood, I believe, in some awe of her, and called her the "witch woman of the mountain." Originally and principally Dutch in extraction, I cannot help thinking that, like Stevenson himself, she shows a touch of some blood which may fairly be called foreign in a Germanic pedigree. Possibly this far-off strain may have brought them into some remote kinship from which some part of their intense affinity may have sprung.

But I have never heard anything to gainsay the idea one forms from the information already available, that she proved a faithful and loving wife, a brave and fitting comrade, a tender and skilful nurse (when her own ill-health permitted) to the delicate, sensitive, and much-suffering author. Herself already an authoress, she published "The Dynamiter" in conjunction with him, and is, I understand, responsible for nearly all the stories in that volume, though it is probable there are touches not a few by Stevenson himself, who possessed a peculiar gift of inserting such touches and giving the whole a Stevensonian ring; so that critics are, I believe, often sadly at fault in any attempts they make

to discriminate between his own work and that of his collaborators. "The Wrong Box," for example, was written in the first instance entirely by Lloyd Osbourne, and merely touched up by Stevenson.

What was the precise nature of Mrs. Stevenson's influence on her husband's literary art, we have hardly sufficient material for judging. After the publication of "The Dynamiter," certainly not the high-water mark of Stevenson's own achievement, her place as collaborator was taken by her son, Samuel Lloyd Osbourne; but, as I say elsewhere, Stevenson's very best work is all done "off his own bat," as cricketers say, and no outside influence, not even that of his brilliant friend, W. E. Henley, seems in any way to strengthen or improve Stevenson's own work. The curious point is, that Stevenson's own faults, that tendency to what has happily been called the "twopence coloured" style, are always at their worst in books over which he collaborated. During their life in Samoa, Mrs. Stevenson's energies were directed to domestic management and to the cultivation of her garden, in which she took the keenest interest. But because she no longer shared directly with our author in his literary work—this "critic on the hearth," a woman of strong and magnetic personality, of such distinction of character and presence, that I have been told by an excellent judge that, even in the presence of her brilliant husband, she took the eye as an independent luminary, and not a mere planet—as some excellent wives have shown themselves, lighted by the neighbourhood of genius—she was not necessarily without considerable influence on Stevenson and his work. But, in any case, she seems to have given Stevenson one of the essentials to the suc-

cessful activity of so sensitive, so poetical, so conscientious an artist. As in some delicate physical or chemical process or experiment every condition must be exactly adjusted to secure success, for artistic production a certain atmosphere is necessary that is only possible in the near neighbourhood of genial and sympathetic personalities. If not herself possessed of great artistic genius, Mrs. Stevenson had the sympathetic artistic temperament which would keep the atmosphere of the household tempered, as sunlight or firelight tempers the air it illumines. What we may call the Celtic intensity, that strange mingling of glow and gloom, of fire and darkness, that makes for mystery and the sense of the supernatural, was clearly I think hers, making her somewhat of the seer, the clairvoyant, making her peculiarly *sympatisch* to one like Stevenson, whose Celtic or Gallic nature was touched by a live coal from the same mystic altar. For days, if not weeks, before Stevenson's death, his wife was full of the gloomiest forebodings, and it was amidst his loving exertions to dissipate her gloomy thoughts that Stevenson was struck down and died.

But we are always driven back on Stevenson's own utterances, with their wonderful trenchancy and accuracy of phrase, so we can best complete and correct our own attempted "impression" of Fanny van de Grift, by quoting his own lines from "Songs of Travel":—

MY WIFE.

Trusty, dusky, vivid, true,
With eyes of gold and bramble-dew,
Steel-true and blade-straight,
The great Artificer
Made my mate.

Honour, anger, valour, fire;
A love that life could never tire,
Death quench or evil stir,
The mighty Master
Gave to her.

Teacher, tender, comrade, wife,
A fellow-farer true through life,
Heart-whole and soul-free,
The august Father
Gave to me.

In dwelling thus on the personality of Mrs. Stevenson immediately on her entrance on the stage of his life, I am doubtless in some respects running on far ahead of the point in my slender thread of narrative at which I had arrived and to which we must return. But I thought this a favourable opportunity of attempting to make a presentment to the reader of some of the leading traits of a personality who must have had so great and so profound an influence on Stevenson's life.

Stevenson's health was, about the time of his marriage (1880), precarious and unsatisfactory. "For the next seven or eight years," writes Mr. Colvin, "his life seemed to hang by a thread. Chronic lung disease, not of the tubercular, but of the less malignant fibroid or catarrhal type, had now declared itself, and the slightest exposure or exertion was apt to bring on a prostrating attack of cough, hæmorrhage, and fever. . . . His life became that of an invalid, vainly seeking health by change of place, rarely out of the doctor's hands, often forbidden to speak (a deprivation almost as great to himself as to those about him), and for the most part denied the pleasures

of outdoor exercise. His courage, naturally of the kind that courts danger in a life of action and adventure, had to be trained to the passive mood of endurance under distressing physical disabilities. The trial was manfully borne; his presence never ceased to be sunshine to those about him; and in every interval of respite he worked with eager toil and in unremitting pursuit of the standards he had set before himself." In his search for health he spent two winters at Davos Platz, and there met and formed a warm friendship for a fellow-sufferer, John Addington Symonds. While at Braemar, in the spring of 1881, the notion of writing a boy's book of adventure, such as he himself had used to delight in, occurred to him, and he started to write "The Sea Cook," afterwards "Treasure Island," and finished it in the autumn at Davos. Published first in *Young Folks*, it created no great stir; but republished in book-form a year later, it reached a public able to appreciate its literary, imaginative, and psychologic qualities, and at once created a kind of *furore*. It rapidly made its author famous, and remains, with the possible exception of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," his most popular work. Nor is it difficult to understand its attraction, combining as it does charm of style, vividness and compactness of narration, and the supreme fascination of one evil but masterful character, Long John Silver, who rivets the reader's attention throughout, even as the eyes of the Ancient Mariner held the Wedding Guest. Writing, as Stevenson did, purely to entertain and interest young people, there is little of his rather perplexing philosophy which, in a book like "Prince Otto," seems to mock and baffle our interest, and in others like

"Dr. Jekyll," "The Master of Ballantrae," and "Ebb-tide," distresses us with a sense of moral and spiritual defeat and disaster. Something of the same applies to "Kidnapped," which appeared in 1886. In that year came also "Dr. Jekyll," a book which took the non-literary public by storm, and was the sensation of the year. Stevenson's success as a writer was now fully assured, but it seems that up to this year in which he scored these two great successes, he had never cleared much more than £300 per annum. Even £300 a year in a dear country like England, and for an invalid, with a delicate wife, compelled constantly to travel, and whose doctor's bill alone must have been a formidable item, is hardly wealth. Still, from this point his receipts from his writings must have grown with considerable speed, and he had at least attained the position of having secured a certain and good market for his books, and was indeed now sought after and even courted by editors and publishers. He had already published the most popular of his books, and stood in one sense in the zenith of his fame, if not of his achievement. The remainder of his life was a continuation of the same heroic industry and endurance, and the same pathetic pursuit of possible conditions of life.

In 1887 the death of his father put an end to one of the strongest inducements he had had to remain in Europe, and on August 17 of that year he left his native shores for the last time—taking his mother as well as his wife and stepson with him—and sailed for America. Too ill to accept the public ovations that had otherwise awaited him, he made the acquaintance and friendship of many distinguished Americans, his

reputation there, in virtue of the profound impression created by his "Dr. Jekyll," standing fully as high as at home. His health, however, received little benefit from the health resorts he tried on the American Continent, and on June 26th the whole family, including, I fancy, his stepdaughter, Mrs. Strong, her husband and child, sailed on board the steam yacht *Cusco* (Captain Otis) for their memorable voyage among the South Sea Islands. Much pleasure and benefit issuing from this mode of life, Stevenson bought in April 1890 the property near Apia in the Samoan Island of Upolo, to which he gave the name Vailima (= five streams, though in fact there were but four). In the course of a few months he was installed there in a rough house, succeeded eventually by a better, which by additions and improvements grew to quite a mansion, which he called jocosely his *Subpriorsford* in reference to Scott's *Abbotsford*. In possession or in prospect of a handsome yearly income, Stevenson proceeded to spend it, or indeed in some measure to anticipate it, till there is no doubt that, like his illustrious predecessor in fiction, he became somewhat embarrassed, in spite of the fact that he was now receiving between £3000 and £4000 a year. The estate itself swallowed much more than it gave. Stevenson kept a kind of open house, like a feudal lord, and was surrounded by numerous native retainers, forming a sort of clan, and "sporting" the Stewart tartan. The native Samoans were a people after Stevenson's own heart. They are beautiful, proud, poetic, impulsive *children*. In his establishment he was king and patriarch, and ruled with mild but inexorable justice, as a judge in a court of final appeal.

It is small wonder that, charmed by these people and in turn beloved by them, he was tempted to put in his oar into the very complicated party politics of Samoa.

But one pretty incident can hardly be omitted before we draw all too quickly to the pathetic close. While Stevenson's friend Mataafa, one of the claimants for the throne in Upolo, was imprisoned by the European powers (American, English, and German), along with the chiefs who had sided with him, Stevenson cheered their captivity with numerous presents of tobacco and other comforts such as they prized. On their release they came to thank him, and declared they must commemorate his kindness by some lasting work, so they decided to make a fine wide road to his house through the bush, a work involving great labour, a thing not loved by any Samoan and despised as unworthy by a chief. Despite all this, it was duly finished and opened with a great feast under the name "The Road of the Loving Heart." On another occasion his favourite body-servant Sosimo had very cleverly anticipated some of Stevenson's wants, and Stevenson had in Samoan fashion thanked him with the compliment, "Great is the Wisdom!" "Nay!" replied Sosimo with truer psychology than the great author, "Great is the Love!"

As long as he remained in Samoa, Stevenson had, for him, marvellous health, but even a visit to Sydney would bring on a relapse. He worked both physically and mentally with great vigour, rising very early and working till midday, and sometimes longer—perhaps too long. To this period belong "The

Master of Ballantrae"—certainly, although gloomy and repellent as a story, one of his greatest books, if not his greatest, both for picturesque and narrative power and profound psychologic truth and subtlety of handling; "Ballads" containing some very powerful poetry, but falling quite flat with the public; "The Wrecker," in conjunction with Osbourne, a rather confused and confusing story, redeemed by much excellent work and the extraordinary vividness and power of the most sanguinary and horrible passages; and "A Footnote to History," admirably written and notable for a magnificent portrayal of the hurricane in Apia Bay, where ironclads were tossed about like cock-boats, one being heaved bodily ashore and landed high and dry on her side as a trophy of the titanic force and fury of the elements. To these one must add the charming "Catriona," sequel to "Kidnapped," and in the opinion of some critics an advance even on that, written in what I may call Stevenson's cheerier, *daylight* manner. In "The Ebb-tide," in which Osbourne had a share, we are back in an atmosphere of crime, blasphemy, drunkenness, greed, and blood, in which, marvellously as it is portrayed, we wonder that the author himself can so long exist. Here in the character of Huish he plants the nadir of vulgar wickedness, as in the Master of Ballantrae he displays what one may almost call the sublime of refined and polished devilry. In the last year of his life he worked chiefly on "St. Ives" and "Weir of Hermiston," both of which exhibit not only unabated but expanding powers—especially the latter work, of which he himself writes "my success frightens me," and so, like a soldier charg-

ing home with "Victory" on his lips, he was suddenly smitten by the long-threatening, long-delaying stroke of Death, and in a few hours from his first swift seizure lay silent for ever amid the grief-stricken company of his family and his faithful Samoan attendants. It was on the afternoon of the 4th December 1894, after he had been working well and successfully, and was chatting cheerily with his wife, who was out of spirits, and, indeed, oppressed with a presentiment of coming evil, that he suddenly clapped his hands to his head, crying "What's that?" fell on his knees by his wife, was helped into an old armchair of his grandfather's; and so, his warfare accomplished, fell asleep.

By the morning his devoted Samoans had cut an almost perpendicular pathway to the top of the mountain Vaéa, which he had designed as his last resting-place. Thither with almost herculean labours they bore him and decked his grave with costly presents, of the most valuable and highly-prized mats. There he lies, by a strange, almost ironic fate, under other stars than ours. Driven forth, not, thank God, by neglect nor by any injustice of man, but by the scourge of sickness and threat of Death and the unfriendliness of his native skies, into his beautiful exile amid tropic seas, he draws, and long will draw, perhaps while the language lasts, with a strange tenderness the hearts of men to that far and lonely Samoan mount.

The actual cause of death was apoplexy, promoted perhaps by over-application, but really an outcome of his original lung-trouble; for the wasted lungs could not do the work demanded of them by his physical and mental activity, and, indeed, his healthiness in other respects may, paradoxical as it seems, have

fought against him. His "Vailima Letters" show that, in spite of this comparative healthiness, he was not without a presentiment of coming evil; indeed, one of his letters written in 1894 to me reads now like a prophecy of his death. But he had his wish. His one fear and horror was of "dying at the top." From that he certainly was saved, though the very same disease that carried him off might have left him to linger out years of mental and bodily helplessness and decay. No, if the gods loved him not well enough to claim him in his youth, they at least were not willing that so bright a flower of genius should be left to wilt and fade; or perhaps they envied us our Tusitala[1] (Teller of Tales), and would fain have him for minstrel at their Olympian feasts.

[1] The name given him by the Samoans.

CHAPTER V

FORMATIVE INFLUENCES

BEFORE considering Stevenson's works in detail, it will be well to inquire what were the main and most important influences, the chief component factors, which, from without, moulded his style and coloured his thought. Fortunately, no man ever turned his reader into a father-confessor more frequently and frankly than Stevenson; so that he is, indeed, almost in danger of carrying the disillusion too far, and showing the uninitiated too clearly the tricks of the trade of authorship. Yet, like the conjurer who sometimes professes to explain his feats to his audience, he retains all the time in his own hands the knack of success.

In the *British Weekly* for May 13, 1887, in an article entitled "Books that have Influenced Me," Stevenson goes thus into the confessional box, beginning with what will be to many a somewhat startling generalisation: "The most influential books and the truest in their influence are works of fiction." To the readers of the *British Weekly*, at any rate, itself a religious paper, the term "fiction" may seem a little wickedly chosen, for the sake of a certain frivolous connotation the word possesses; for we have only to turn the leaf to find that it here really denotes works of imagination, including the plays of

Shakespeare and the "Pilgrim's Progress." These, at least, are mentioned in such close connection with the opening generalisation that they must be held as falling within it. "Shakespeare," continues Stevenson, "has served me best. Few living friends have had an influence so strong for good as Hamlet and Rosalind." He had seen the latter played by Mrs. Scott-Siddons. "Nothing," he writes, "has ever more moved, more delighted, more refreshed me, nor has the influence quite passed away." The present writer has seen the same actress in this part, and, if not so profoundly impressed as his distinguished school-friend, carries still in his memory a charming picture of this gifted artist in shepherd's dress, crook in hand. "Perhaps," continues Stevenson, "my dearest and best friend outside of Shakespeare is d'Artagnan —the elderly d'Artagnan of the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*. I know not a more human soul, nor, in his way, a finer; I shall be very sorry for the man who is so much of a pedant in morals that he cannot learn from the Captain of Musketeers. Lastly, I must name the 'Pilgrim's Progress,' a book that breathes of every beautiful and valuable emotion."

"But of works of art little can be said; their influence is profound and silent, like the influence of nature; they mould by contact; we drink them up like water, and are bettered, yet know not how."

He goes on to mention the *Essais* of Montaigne, the New Testament, and in particular the Gospel according to St. Matthew; and Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass," a book which "tumbled the world upside down for me, blew into space a thousand cobwebs of genteel and ethical illusion; and,

having thus shaken my tabernacle of lies, set me back again upon a strong foundation of all the original and manly virtues."

He then mentions the works of Herbert Spencer and Goethe's Life by Lewes, the latter having, I believe, a stronger influence on him for the time than appeared to him the case on later reflection, for I am quite certain he said to me that it had impressed him more than the Gospel story. This led probably to a revulsion which causes him here to say, "I know no one whom I less admire than Goethe; he seems a very epitome of the sins of genius." "Biography," he continues, "usually so false to its office, does here for once perform for us some of the work of fiction, reminding us, that is, of the truly mingled tissue of man's nature, and how huge faults and shining virtues cohabit and persevere in the same character."

He then mentions Martial, in whom he seems to have found serious thought and pleasant verses not usually ascribed to the satirist, whom Stevenson evidently studied in the original. He then speaks of the "Meditations" of Marcus Aurelius, and thus describes their effect on himself: "When you have read, you carry away with you a memory of the man himself; it is as though you had touched a loyal hand, looked into brave eyes, and made a noble friend; there is another bond on you thenceforward, binding you to life and the love of virtue."

"Every one," proceeds Stevenson, meaning every one who is any one, "has been influenced by Wordsworth, and it is hard to tell precisely how. A certain innocence, a rugged austerity of joy, a sight of the stars, 'the silence that there is among the hills,' some-

thing of the cold thrill of dawn, cling to his work and give it a particular address to what is best in us. Such are the best teachers; a dogma learned is only a new error—the old one was perhaps as good; but a spirit communicated is a perpetual possession."

It would be difficult better to define the influence of Wordsworth, an influence so curiously undervalued, it seems to me, out of Britain and America, than is here done—as "a spirit communicated." To read Wordsworth is to sit intellectually and morally on the mountain-tops of Life, to breathe the air that is purest and richest in spiritual ozone. He passed on to Stevenson, as to all his true followers, a password, an "open sesame" to the poetic treatment of Nature, which makes them free citizens of that domain. Yet must the possessor at his peril be himself and not a mere Echoing Rock of Wordsworthianism. And this is the case, I think, with Stevenson; clearly traceable as the Wordsworth influence often is. Wordsworth's own limitations arose from his being too much of the recluse, in his rustic shrinking from the main currents of human life and action, and in a judicial blindness to the darker sides of Nature. Stevenson plunges much more boldly into the deep and dark regions of Life and Nature; never blind to what is beautiful and of good report in either, he does not flinch from the evil and criminal in the one, nor from the terrible, the seemingly malign, and even diabolic, in the other.

Stevenson goes on to say, in some respects very truly: "I suppose, when I am done, I shall find that I have forgotten much that is influential, as I see already I have forgotten Thoreau and Hazlitt, whose

paper 'On the Spirit of Obligations,' was a turning-point in my life, and Penn, whose little book of aphorisms had a brief but strong effect on me, and Mitford's 'Tales of Old Japan,' wherein I found for the first time the proper attitude of any rational man to his country's laws—a secret found, and kept, in the Asiatic Islands."

The only other modern writer named on this occasion is George Meredith, and that in reference to "The Egoist," of which Stevenson writes, "It belongs to didactic art; and from all the works I have read (and I have read thousands) stands in a place by itself." It "is a satire; but a satire of a singular quality. It is yourself that is hunted down, these are your own faults that are dragged into the day and numbered, with lingering relish, with cruel cunning and precision. I think Willoughby (the Egoist) an unmanly but a very serviceable exposure of myself." I can well remember, twenty years ago and more, Stevenson expressing to me his enthusiastic admiration for Meredith, and recommending me to read "Beauchamp's Career," and, I believe, about the same time Hawthorne's "Scarlet Letter," which reminds one of another potent influence on Stevenson's thought and style, *i.e.* Hawthorne himself. Stevenson was from the first a true-blue Meredithian, and so to the end, though how he can have been blind to Meredith's irritating defects of style and his fatal lack —with a few exceptions—of giving his characters real, self-centred vitality, as the true masters, Shakespeare, Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, and even George Eliot can, is to me somewhat of a mystery. To account for it one must, I think, fall back on a

remarkable generosity and humility that Stevenson exhibits in his estimate of his contemporaries in his own line. As, in another spasm of the same complaint, he says elsewhere, "I would give my hand to write like Hardy"[1] (I know it was once the mode to call Hardy a master of the bucolic in English, a mode probably originating in Fleet Street), where one knows so much about milk—and water; but which surely committed effectual *felo-de-se* on coming face to face with the impossible milkmaid society in "Tess o' the D'Urbervilles." Still, Stevenson adds, "I serve under Meredith's colours always."

In this instance he is evidently thinking more of those books and authors who have influenced him as a man in his character, his philosophy, and his view of and attitude towards life, than of those who have been his models and teachers in point and style, and his predecessors in these branches of literary art in which he himself excelled, though of the names here cited Dumas, Montaigne, and Hazlitt at any rate are exceptions and have on him a double influence, both as author and man.

When asked by an interviewer[2] for advice on the methods to be pursued in the cultivation of literary style, Stevenson recommends literary aspirants "to read everything," and, assuming they will read the literature of the present century for their own fun, says, "If they will read the seventeenth and the eighteenth century; if they read Shakespeare and Thomas Browne and Jeremy Taylor and Dryden's prose and Samuel Johnson—and I suppose Addison,

[1] *Pall Mall Gazette*, August 8, 1888.
[2] *Pall Mall Gazette*, June 14, 1893.

though I never read him myself—and browse about in all the authors of these two centuries, they will get the finest course of literature there is." The exception of Addison here is remarkable, and can surely hardly mean that he, Stevenson, had never read anything of Addison's, but that he had not made a study of him as of the others, though personally I am of the opinion here implied, viz., that Addison is an overrated literary paragon, set before us like the headline of a copybook, which no one but a writing-master or a lawyer's clerk seriously expects or wishes to emulate. But it seems strange to miss from the list so fresh and *naïve* and humane a writer as Goldsmith, and one to whom Stevenson is so clearly indebted as Sterne.

"I should be frightened," we are told, "to tell any young man to read Carlyle. I was afraid to read him when I was young, because I felt he cast a sort of spell upon me that might be called possession, and I was afraid of becoming a mere echo. Your students should certainly read Ruskin—for choice I would have them read 'Arrows of the Chace.' I would have them read Scott . . . he was undoubtedly slovenly. He makes me long to box his ears—God bless him! —but to a luminous and striking degree he is free from the faults many of us possess." Then he again commends Hazlitt, "there's a lot of style in Hazlitt" —Napier's "Peninsular War," and Pater's "Studies in the Renaissance." "It (the last-named) is an extreme of a kind, and had a huge influence on me when it was first published. I think it is always wholesome to read Leslie Stephen. I would recommend them to read George Saintsbury."

Stevenson then proceeds to extol the Classics, especially Latin, in which he was a fair scholar. "The Latin language," he writes, "of which I profess myself a devotee, is so extraordinarily different from our own, and is capable of suggesting such extraordinary and enchanting effects, that it gives a man spurs and wings to his fancy."

In regard to Stevenson's own style, next to his close study of his own literature and language and of the later and less beautiful of the classical tongues, must take rank his wide, appreciative reading in French. To those of Montaigne and Dumas we must add another great French name, that of Molière, and, among later writers, that of Hugo to the roll of those whose influence is discernible in Stevenson's work. Speaking of his favourite books, those he was in the habit of reading and re-reading, he says in "A Gossip on Romance": "One or two of Scott's novels, Shakespeare, Molière, Montaigne, 'The Egoist,' and the *Vicomte de Bragelonne*, form the inner circle of my intimates. Behind these come a good troop of dear acquaintances, 'The Pilgrim's Progress' in the front rank, 'The Bible in Spain' (Borrow) not far behind. Of those once dear and much thumbed, but who now remain on the shelves, are Wordsworth, Horace, Burns, and Hazlitt." Of those again "who smile and frown on me by turns," he cites Virgil and Herrick.

Still, we ask ourselves, is it possible that our frank-seeming author is keeping some trump up his sleeve? As we have plucked thence Sterne and Goldsmith, may we not also shake out Lamb, De Quincey, and Poe, and even the Brontës? As Stevenson must have known and admired Lamb, so he cannot have passed the

greenness of his youth without a touch of the De Quincey fever, nor can the mantle of the author of the "Fall of the House of Usher" have fallen on Stevenson's shoulders quite unperceived. Has also that intensity of presentment that marks the works of Charlotte and Emily Brontë, in common with that of the author of "The Master of Ballantrae," come to the younger writer without contact and from pure mental kinship? And the immortal Pepys, on whom one of our author's most delightful essays is written, has he not bequeathed to his admirer and critic some of his *naïve* gift of turning reader into confidant? Then the author of "Treasure Island" claims frankly a literary lineage from writers of adventures from Defoe downward to Cooper, Marryat, Mayne Reid, and the beloved R. M. Ballantyne of our school-days, who, like his more versatile and brilliant pupil, lies not in native earth, but in the near and sacred neighbourhood of Keats and Shelley under the walls of the Eternal City itself.

The marvel is that, eclectic in a way as Stevenson is, he can still maintain so unmistakable an individuality. However much we may be reminded in any book of Stevenson's of some other author, we can never say that such author would have written the book just so. There is always some element added or subtracted that makes a sharp enough distinction. If we are reminded of Scott, we find superadded the finish and glamour of the true literary artist, the presence of a suppler and more penetrative and alert intellect, and subtler psychological analysis. Far behind Scott in the power of instinctive, irreflective, spontaneous creation of character, Stevenson tells his story usually with

more art and with a firmer grip on his reader. Where we fancy we catch the note of Sterne, we find it stripped of an antiquated sentimentality, and refined from the suggestive and expectant titillations with which Sterne rather cheaply, if skilfully, enlivens his reader's interest.

CHAPTER VI

EARLY TRAVELS AND ESSAYS

THIS is amply exemplified in the first book Stevenson published, "An Inland Voyage," being merely the chronicle of a canoe-voyage through part of Belgium and France, but related with such grace, humour, vivacity and *bonhomie*, that it is hardly possible to find a page in which one or other of these qualities, or perhaps all of them combined, render the reading, even apart from the narrative, an exhilarating pleasure.

Very amusing, especially to an Englishman, and one who knows how far from being an athlete Stevenson himself was (his companion, the late Sir Walter Simpson, I have seen on the river at Cambridge rowing stroke to the Caius College boat), is the account of their enthusiastic reception by the members of the *Royal Sport Nautique* in Brussels :—

"We were English boating-men, and the Belgian boating-men fell upon our necks. I wonder if French Huguenots were as cordially received by English Protestants when they came across the Channel out of great tribulation. But after all, what religion knits people so closely as a common sport?"

Then, commenting on the remark of these ingenuous Belgian youths, "We are employed in commerce during the day; but in the evening *voyez vous, nous sommes serieux*," he writes :—

"These were the words. They were all employed over the frivolous mercantile concerns of Belgium during the day; but in the evening they found some hours for the serious concerns of life. I may have a wrong idea of wisdom, but I think that was a very wise remark. People connected with literature and philosophy are busy all their days in getting rid of second-hand notions and false standards. It is their profession in the sweat of their brows, by dogged thinking, to recover their old fresh view of life, and distinguish what they really and originally like from what they have only learned to tolerate perforce. And these *Royal Nautical Sportsmen* had the distinction still quite legible in their hearts. . . . They still knew that the interest they took in their business was a trifling affair compared to their spontaneous long-suffering affection for nautical sports. To know what you prefer, instead of humbly saying Amen to what the world says you ought to prefer, is to have kept your soul alive. Such a man may be generous; he may be honest in something more than the commercial sense; he may love his friends with an elective personal sympathy, and not accept them as an adjunct of the station to which he has been called. He may be a man in short, acting on his own instincts, keeping in his own shape that God made him in, and not a mere crank in the social engine-house, welded on principles he does not understand, and for purposes he does not care for."

But even the members of the *Royal Sport Nautique* have the defect of their quality. One of them accompanies the two travellers to their hotel.

"For three stricken hours," says Stevenson, "did

this excellent young man sit beside us to dilate on boats and boat-races; and before he left, he was kind enough to order our bed-room candles. But this was not the worst, though bad enough, for nothing will do but that the one must row next day in the Club 'eight,' and the other exhibit his prowess against the Champion Canoeist of Europe." So the heroes of the hour had recourse to ignominious flight. "It seemed ungrateful, but we tried to make that good on a card loaded with sincere compliments. And, indeed, it was no time for scruples, for we seemed to feel the hot breath of the Champion on our necks."

Later on Stevenson complains of the difficulties and even insults he had to undergo on account of his un-English appearance.

"If he [that is Stevenson himself] travels without a passport, he is cast without any figure about the matter into noisome dungeons; if his papers are in order he is suffered to go his way indeed, but not until he has been humiliated by a general incredulity. He is a born British subject, yet he has never persuaded a single official of his nationality. He flatters himself he is indifferent honest; yet he is rarely taken for anything better than a spy, and there is no absurd and disreputable means of livelihood but has been attributed to him in some heat of official or popular distrust. . . . It is a good thing, believe me, to present a good normal type of the nation you belong to."

He might have added that it is well, if you wish to travel peacefully and comfortably, to have some ostensible object in view, or pretext of such, which will commend itself as credible and creditable alike to peasant and policeman, to hotel-keeper and petty

official, and, having this, to play and especially to dress to the part. Travelling, as Stevenson and his friend did, in what was then an unusual method, careless and eccentric in dress and appearance, often drenched and bedabbled with rain and mud, they subjected themselves to ignominious rebuffs and disappointments. The prevailing theory was that they were pedlars, a conception which, according to the dignity of the place of entertainment at which they presented themselves, led to abrupt and shameful ejection, or to an almost pampering attention and civility; for a pedlar, as it seems, a pariah in one level of society, is a plutocrat, if not an aristocrat, in another. Unfavourable as the circumstances were for comfort, they were particularly rich in suggestions for that playful and finely touched satire at the expense of all that is conventional, always so welcome to Stevenson's Bohemian nature and so favourable to the play of his humour, at once so caustic and so kindly. They brought him also in contact with a great motley of characters, whom he draws with genial pencil, as it were on the margin of his journal. One of the best of these, M. de Vauversin, the strolling player, undoubtedly reappears in one of Stevenson's brightest and best stories, "Providence and the Guitar."

Although Stevenson had already (1878) written and published in magazines many essays and short stories, they did not as yet appear in book form, and his next volume was "Picturesque Notes on Edinburgh," in which he, sometimes playfully and gracefully, sometimes earnestly and graphically, depicts the beauties or exposes the foibles and defects of his native city and her citizens. One episode which he briefly sketches

illustrates very well his unusual power of graving a scene clearly, strongly, ineffaceably on the reader's mind with a few touches. It is that of two sisters who lived together in a one-roomed house in a wynd or close of old Edinburgh, and were for long inseparably attached; till one day they had a difference—perhaps in theology—and swore never to speak to each other again. Their room was divided by a chalk line, and each remained in her own domain to the day of her death imperturbably silent and hostile. In a few vividly imagined touches, Stevenson brings before us this unnatural life of sisterly enmity; how each must have acted against the other a silent but eloquent pantomime of hostility and contempt, till even their very devotions were poisoned and perhaps employed as a weapon of mutual humiliation and exasperation. It is highly characteristic of Stevenson, both as showing his power to project a scene on to the reader's mind with the vividness of limelight, and at the same time to charge it with psychologic intensity and interest, and also illustrating his partiality for strong effects—effects indeed so strong that they tend to pass into the purely revolting.

In "Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes," we find our author again taking the road, this time without human companionship, but equipped, so to speak, with a sleeping-sack (to enable him to sleep in the open), and a Donkey, or Donkeyess, Modestine by name. Modestine was a part of the outfit, being merely designed to carry the sack and such baggage as our Bohemian deigned to consider necessary. The opening chapters, describing the manufacture of the sack, the purchase of Modestine and the luckless out-

set of the expedition, are extremely amusing. Modestine takes a leading rôle and exercises a disastrous reflex action on the moral character of her so-called master, till we feel he is rendering himself liable to prosecution by the same tribunal, before which Heine irreverently proposed to arraign the Deity. And here we might perhaps convict Stevenson of a lapse into *Tendenz;* for in this exposé of his own possibilities of something very like cruelty he is exemplifying a pet doctrine of his, viz. (and this lies at the root of his fondness and toleration for wrongdoers), that we can none of us be sure to what crime we might not descend, if only our temptation were sufficiently acute. It may be a wholesome doctrine to apply exclusively to ourselves to keep down the high stomach of our virtue, but pressed too far does it not land us in the pusillanimous modern doctrine that we are the mere creatures of our environment? Stevenson is by taste and predilection, and even by deliberate intent, pure artist and humanist, but the didactic strain in his Scotch blood is ever too strong for him and is constantly betraying him into a vein of moralising, philosophising, or even religion. (Will Professor Weissman explain to us how these preaching corpuscles get into our blood, if not transmitted from Puritan and Covenanting ancestors?) But to me I confess these qualities give an added charm to this sort of writing, enhancing the sense of intimacy and frank *camaraderie* with the author which invests his slightest experience with interest for us, as though it were our own. The incident of the Plymouth Brother is a happy example of what I mean :—

"A step or two farther I was overtaken by an old

man in a brown nightcap, clear-eyed, weather-beaten, with a faint excited smile. . . . It was not much past six; and for healthy people who have slept enough, that is an hour of expansion and of open and trustful talk."

"'Connaissez-vous le Seigneur?' he said at length. I asked him what Seigneur he meant; but he only repeated the question with more emphasis and a look in his eyes denoting hope and interest.

"'Ah,' I said, pointing upwards, 'I understand you now. Yes, I know Him; He is the best of acquaintances.'

"The old man said he was delighted. 'Hold,' he added, striking his bosom, 'it makes me happy here.' And there are few who know the Lord in these valleys, he went on to tell me; not many, but a few. 'Many are called,' he quoted, 'and few chosen.'

"'My father,' said I, 'it is not easy to say who knows the Lord; and it is none of our business. Protestants and Catholics, and even those who worship stones, may know Him and be known by Him; for He has made all.'

"I did not know I was so good a preacher.

"The old man assured me he thought as I did, and repeated his expressions of pleasure at meeting me. . . .

"I began to understand I was figuring in questionable taste as a member of some sect to me unknown; but I was more pleased with the pleasure of my companion than embarrassed by my own equivocal position. Indeed I can see no dishonesty in not avowing a difference; and especially in these high matters, where we have all a sufficient assurance that, whoever may be in the wrong, we ourselves are not completely in the

right. The truth is much talked about; but this old man in a brown nightcap showed himself so simple, sweet, and friendly that I am not unwilling to profess myself his convert. . . .

"And if ever at length, out of our separate and sad ways, we should all come together into one common house, I have a hope to which I dearly cling, that my mountain Plymouth brother will hasten to shake hands with me again."

Closely as they followed on each other, appearing in successive years, there seems a decided distinction of mood between the "Inland Voyage" and "The Travels with a Donkey." In the first, voyaging in company and sleeping under human roofs, the traveller is in a lighter and gayer mood; in the second, a lonely pilgrim with a recalcitrant she-ass for company, and sleeping often under the bare heavens with their friendly but solemn stars, the prevailing mood is sadder and deeper, and we are reminded less of Sterne and Heine and more of the "Pilgrim's Progress" itself, which, indeed, seems to have run frequently in Stevenson's mind. There seems as if a vein of allegory ran through the narrative; Stevenson himself, like Christian, representing the urgent soul, ever pressing onward, but hindered and thwarted by impediment and impedimenta; balked by his own imperfections and limitations, figured in the person of Modestine; insulted and scorned by adverse outside forces, as by the rude and ignorant peasantry.

Stevenson now collected (1881–2) and published, in two volumes, "Virginibus Puerisque" and "Familiar Studies of Men in Books," a number of essays which had already appeared in the leading magazines, *Corn-*

hill, *Macmillan*, the *Portfolio*, *Temple Bar*, &c. The first-named volume was more general and strictly human in its themes, the second more literary and critical; the one perhaps more piquantly interesting to the general reader, the other more attractive and instructive to the critic and *littérateur*, and especially to the student of those literary influences that went to the making of Stevenson himself.

The note of the volume *Virginibus Puerisque* is, as has been before indicated, the vindication of youth in its proclivities and propensities, and, perhaps, more broadly stated, a defence and eulogy of the impulsive and instinctive as against the logical and prudential. A sort of Kantian process is repeated in which we are shown the vanity of Life and its aims in the cold light of abstract Reason, only to be reassured when the warm colours of passion, courage, joy, and love are allowed again to redden and kindle the picture. Stevenson always reminds me of the "Wise Youth" in Meredith's "Richard Feverel"; he is to the end of the chapter (as he was in appearance) a strange mixture of Youth and Age, the disenchantments of the one and the high mettle of the other. In the title-essay of this book he discourses at large of Love and Marriage in many moods, sometimes almost cynical, sometimes chivalrous, almost ruthless in his disenchantments, but always with a certain saving tolerance and tenderness, and concluding the second chapter of the essay with what one must call a truly brave and noble passage, recalling somewhat a parallel passage in Emerson's "Domestic Life," but at the same time highly typical of Stevenson himself.

"And the true conclusion," he writes, "of this

paper is to turn our back on apprehensions and embrace that shining and courageous virtue Faith. Hope is the boy, a blind, headlong, pleasant fellow, good to chase swallows with the salt. Faith is the grave, experienced, yet smiling man. Hope lives on ignorance; open-eyed Faith is built on a knowledge of our life, of the tyranny of circumstance, and the frailty of human resolution. Hope looks for unqualified success; but Faith counts on certain failure, and takes honourable defeat to be a form of victory. Hope is a kind old Pagan; but Faith grew up in Christian days, and early learnt humility. In the one temper, a man is indignant that he cannot spring up in a clap to heights of elegance and virtue; in the other, out of a sense of his infirmities, he is filled with confidence because a year has come and gone, and he has still preserved some rays of honour. In the first he expects an angel for a wife; in the last, he knows she is like himself—erring, thoughtless, and untrue; but like himself also, filled with a struggling radiancy of better things, and adorned with ineffective qualities. You may safely go to school with hope; but, ere you marry, should have learned the mingled lesson of the world—that dolls are stuffed with sawdust, and yet are excellent playthings; that hope and love address themselves to a perfection never realised, and yet, firmly held, become the salt and staff of life; that you yourself are compacted of infirmities, perfect, you might say, in imperfection, and yet you have a something in you lovable and worth preserving; and that, while the mass of mankind lies under this scurvy condemnation, you will scarcely find one but, by some generous reading, will

become to you a lesson, a model, and a noble spouse through life. So thinking, you will constantly support your own unworthiness, and easily forgive the failings of your friend. Nay, you will be wisely glad that you retain the sense of blemishes; for the faults of married people continually spur up each of them, hour by hour, to do better, and to meet and love upon a higher ground. And ever between the failures there will be some glimpse of kind virtues to encourage and console."

Here again we find the preaching corpuscles at work, preaching over again to us less exultantly, more soberly, less sanguinely, but not less tenderly, the apostolic doctrine of charity.

But it is amusing to note that occasionally the Wise Youth "gives himself away," as the phrase goes with us, with a bit of dogmatism. "Certainly, if I could help it," he perilously asserts, "I would never marry a wife who wrote. The practice of letters is miserably harassing to the mind; and after an hour or two's work, all the more human portion of the author is extract; he will bully, backbite, and speak daggers." This passage is doubly stultified, in the first place, by his marrying an authoress, and, in the second, by his own retaining of his humanity intact, in spite of far more than "an hour or two's work." The fact is, all depends on how one's work goes. When it goes well, one may emerge from one's study with the heart of a St. Francis for the whole creation; at another time one may issue forth cherishing the black desire of Caligula that humanity had but one neck. No doubt, as Stevenson justly remarks, the author lacks that mechanical outlet for his nervous

energy which the painter has in the exercise of his craft. If an author had to engross or illuminate his work, or produce it like Blake, with his own illustrations, it would greatly relieve the purely mental tension of composition.

But one of the stimulating charms of the book is to find, amid much curious and exact knowledge and observation, an occasional waywardness and petulance of over-statement, which deceives no one, least of all the author himself, but which spurs the reader sharply out of any jog-trot of acquiescence into which he may be tempted to settle. The essay, "An Apology for Idlers," is itself a wilful fling in the face of received opinion, and comes curiously from a man who was really a hard worker, and yet there is no small grain of truth even in such sweeping and seemingly paradoxical statements as this:—

"Extreme *business*, whether at school or college, kirk, or market, is a symptom of deficient vitality; and a faculty for idleness implies a catholic appetite and a strong sense of personal identity."

He is a very purblind observer who does not at once admit the truth underlying this extreme and unqualified statement; the truth that accounts for that phenomenon, often wondered and lamented over by virtuous and worthy persons, viz., how it comes that the "model" boy and student is so often a failure in later life, and how exemplary and excellent persons bore us to death, while the ne'er-do-well, the rogue, and even the drunkard entertain and sometimes even edify us. But the true correction to this extreme and, in some quarters, dangerous statement is probably made, when we observe, as we may do in the case of the writer

himself, and in that of Dr. Johnson, from whom he takes his text, that in the very same natures which have this "faculty of idleness," lies also a very strong capacity for work. This kind of idleness it is that allows the mind to recover its spring and temper again. Into this so-called idleness flashes even inspiration. It was probably in a moment of such idleness that Newton noticed the fall of the apple, and that Watt was struck by the energy of the steam from his mother's kettle. So also in dreaming or even in fever, comes the long-sought idea;—but this is a point to which we shall have to return.

I confess to finding it difficult to get away from this volume of what are to me all old favourites, and which combine the charm of old association with a certain perennial freshness. While a strong individuality of style and feeling pervades all the essays, there is no lack of variety, from the pathos of "Ordered South," written almost face to face with death, to the trumpet notes of "The English Admirals," the true and delicate criticism of "Some Portraits of Raeburn," the mingling of delight and terror in "Pan's Pipes," and the picturesque presentment of the "Plea for Gas Lamps." From this latter we extract a few graphic sentences picturing the state of matters (in England at least) before the era of Gas Lamps:—

"But sun, moon, and stars abstracted or concealed, the nightfaring inhabitant had to fall back—we speak on the authority of old prints—upon stable lanthorns *two storeys in height*. Many holes drilled in the conical turret-roof of this *vagabond Pharos*, let up *spouts of dazzlement* into the bearer's eyes; and as he paced forth in the ghostly darkness, *carrying his own Sun*

by a ring about his finger, day and night swung to and fro and up and down about his footsteps. Blackness haunted his path, and the curfew being struck, he found no light but that he travelled in throughout the township."

Stevenson might also be called a literary Rembrandt, for he is a great master of all these Rembrandtesque effects. The famous, unforgetable duel scene in "The Master of Ballantrae" is a matter of such chiaroscuro, with its two candles set on the ground under the great dark dome of night; and in a weird little story, "The Misadventures of John Nicholson," the scene of which is laid in our old garden near Edinburgh, he uses a similar device very effectively. But the felicity of the above expressions, which I underline, cannot fail to strike the reader. The humorous exaggerations of "two storeys in height" and "vagabond Pharos," "carrying his own Sun," &c., tickle the fancy and enhance the weird vividness of the picture. A little later in the same essay comes a specially happy phrase descriptive of the lamplighter going his rounds in the evening, and "at intervals knocking another luminous hole into the dusk."

CHAPTER VII

CRITICAL ESSAYS

STEVENSON'S next volume, essays assembled under the title "Familiar Studies of Men and Books," lacks the unity and freedom of the more general and spontaneous essays in *Virginibus Puerisque*, and will probably prove less permanently attractive and interesting than its predecessor. For us it is, in two directions, especially instructive, as giving indications in the first place of his views and aspirations in literature, and in the second, of his conception of what a man of letters ought to be in his conduct. But, even in these respects, considering what we already know, there is not so much to be learned as might be expected. In essays on purely self-chosen themes such as "*Æs Triplex*," "Child's Play," "A Plea for Gas Lamps," &c., the writer conceives and moulds the subject according to his own fancy, and his very charm consists in being suggestive and incomplete. But when a man selects themes so large as "Victor Hugo's Romances," "Walt Whitman," "François Villon, Student, Poet and Housebreaker," and "Charles of Orleans," he raises expectations of completeness that are hardly fulfilable. This gives some of these essays somewhat of a lob-sided effect—as Stevenson himself, as he owns with modesty and judgment in his preface, is well aware—somewhat too much the effect of a

current review of a superior class. Had Stevenson been a more analytic and methodical critic, this volume, if less lively and picturesque, would have been more consistent and continuous in its interest; and so, curiously as might seem in the work of so thorough a man of letters, Stevenson is here always at his best in his treatment of the men, rather than of their works. But even here, as he himself admits, there is something not altogether fortunate in his attitude and tone, and a something that jars on us the more because we have a right from him—of all men—to expect better things. It is a ring of something hard in his treatment, especially of Burns and Villon, an outcrop of the Puritanical granite that so closely underlay the gentle Hedonism of the artistic side of his nature. In the author who has presented us with such attractive villains as Long John Silver and the Master of Ballantrae it seems strange that he cannot touch the foibles of Burns and even the crimes of Villon with a little less of what, in him, seems like acidity. No doubt there were difficulties in both cases, not inconsiderable. In Scotland, where the interest in Burns culminates, it is only to speak the words of soberness to say that he is no longer a mere man, but a kind of composite deity in which the piety of the "Cottar's Saturday Night" and the sentiment of "To Mary in Heaven," adroitly counterpoising "The Jolly Beggars," "Tam o' Shanter," "Holy Willie's Prayer," "Willie Brewed a Peck o' Maut," and addresses to illegitimate children and songs to equally illegitimate loves, produces a kind of hero-saint and martyr who figures alike in the unwritten Calendar of the Scottish Church and in those of Bacchus and

Venus. For any critic to treat of such a being rationally and temperately without offending one class or other, or perhaps both, of Burns's votaries is difficult indeed. It was thus a particularly perilous venture when Stevenson, acknowledging that "Mr. Carlyle made an inimitable bust of the poet's head in gold," proposes to deal more with the idol's feet, which were of clay. He thus takes on him the ungracious rôle of the iconoclast, and tapping here and there with critical hammer is soon able to show undoubted evidence of the presence of the inferior material. This was an unamiable attitude for one who had himself much of the poet in his nature, who was, so to speak, a brother-at-arms in letters, a sworn foe of mere respectability and convention, and what is more, perhaps, still, a "brither Scot." The very fact that so much that Stevenson says is deadly true, that it was highly necessary for some one to say it, does not prevent us wishing that some one else had said it, or that he had said it somewhat differently. Yet in many respects Stevenson's insight into and judgment of Burns's character is penetrating and true; as where he writes:—

"A leading trait throughout his [Burns's] whole career was his desire to be in love. . . . His affections were often enough touched, but perhaps never engaged. He was all his life on a voyage of discovery, but it does not appear conclusively that he ever touched the happy isle. . . . Burns was formed for love; he had passion, tenderness, and a singular bent in that direction; he could foresee, with the intuition of an artist, what love ought to be; and he could not conceive a worthy life without it. But he had

ill-fortune, and was besides so greedy after every shadow of the true divinity, and so much the slave of a strong temperament, that perhaps his nerve was relaxed and his heart had lost the power of self-devotion before an opportunity occurred."

This and more that is here said, if not absolutely true, is undoubtedly very near the mark; but to the devotees of Burns it is the rankest blasphemy. Ranking Burns's love poetry among the greatest achievements of the kind, they are naturally scandalised at being told that it sprang from anything less than the highest and sincerest passion. This arises from their being unfamiliar with the fact, which is often thrust upon that much-abused person, especially in Scotland, the critic, that the best poetry is not necessarily the outcome of the strongest and sincerest feeling; a certain strength, a certain sincerity there must be, but a lyric, especially in its most exquisite forms, frail as a butterfly, delicate as a blossom, must be fashioned with a dainty touch and not with the trembling and eager fingers of an overmastering passion. Even in this domain Wordsworth's "emotion recollected in tranquillity," though somewhat pedantically worded, points to the real necessity of some abatement of passion before it takes artistic form. "To Mary in Heaven," to go no further than Burns himself, sprang out of *recollected* passion, just as "Gae Bring to Me a Pint o' Wine" is passion dramatically conceived and not uttered at first hand, and yet is one of Burns's very finest lyrics. But it is just this kind of disenchantment that the faithful resent, just as the orthodox resent any doubt thrown on the authenticity of the Bible or the authority of

the Church or the Pope, as the case may be. But the bitterness of feeling that Stevenson has stirred up against himself by this essay is, indeed, hardly credible. It went the absurd and almost incredible length of making persons, otherwise reported sane, write to the papers decrying the erection of a memorial to Stevenson on this ground alone, that he here writes disparagingly of Burns; and so far did one writer, in his blind fury, forget common-sense and decency that he suggested that Stevenson wrote out of pure malice in revenge for Burns's slighting line on the "cauld harangues" of his maternal grandfather. Stevenson's essay is on the whole a salutary protest against the unreasoning Burnsolatry which is so prevalent, and he seems to have succeeded only in martyrising himself. Stevenson, indeed, whose own attitude to women, in spite of his realism, had in it always an element of chivalry, could not stomach Burns's promiscuous love-making, which Burns himself fully recognised as destructive of all the higher and better feelings towards the sex, and as degrading to his whole moral nature. And yet Burns seems never to have lost his natural kindness of heart; is never cynical towards his victims, if victims they could justly be called, who seemed mostly to have plumped so readily into his arms.

In judging of the moral conduct of a man of genius, as of an ordinary mortal, the first thing to be taken into account is the surrounding moral atmosphere, and it will nearly always be found that, however a man's genius may raise him intellectually above his surroundings, he is very apt in his conduct closely to resemble his neighbours. Genius, at least artistic

genius, is no talisman to exempt from temptations common to all, and just as we find Byron's morals the morals of society in the time of the Regency, so we find those of Burns closely resembling those of the Ayrshire peasantry around him. There may have been pure women and even men at the court of George the Fourth, and the same may doubtless be said of the Ayrshire peasantry, but the moral tone of neither the one nor the other can be called high, and neither poet escaped its influence. Many of the "honest men and bonnie lassies" of whom Burns sings did not, we must fear, value continency much more highly than the wife of Bath, and it was not long before Burns, in spite of the strict piety of his home, came to take their view of it. It is difficult to say whether anything different in his life would have cured the Don Juanism of "ranting, roving Robin."

Had Burns married Jean Armour in the first instance, as he was willing to do, and actually believed he had done, it is possible he might have settled down to less vagrant habits in love, and he would have had no reason to doubt, as he certainly had, Jean's affection and loyalty to him. In the case of Burns, his laxity in sexual morals did not produce the same disastrous effects that they would undoubtedly have done on a man of more natural refinement. This is, I think, a point Stevenson has missed, as was likely he would, being naturally and by upbringing more refined, and lacking Burns's inordinate sexual proclivities. Subtract from Burns these proclivities, encouraged no doubt by indulgence and a degree of conviviality much excused in his day, and almost universal in the social levels to which he

tended to gravitate, and you have an honest, well-meaning, kindly and by no means idle and ill-doing man; a man sounder at heart than many who have led a respectable and comparatively blameless life.

One act of justice Stevenson has done, and he was certainly one of the first, if not the first, to do it, namely, to vindicate the conduct of Burns's contemporaries, and especially of Edinburgh society, upon whose presumably broad back it has been customary for Burns's admirers and worshippers to pack the poet's sins, and then drive it forth like a scapegoat into the wilderness of perpetual obloquy. In this regard Burns was much more fortunate than many another poet. His genius was very promptly recognised and he was made the lion of an Edinburgh season, being treated rationally enough by society and showing solid sense and shrewdness in the way he bore his honours. But no man can be, and no self-respecting man desires to be, perpetually lionised, if lionised at all. He then returned to his natural surroundings, where his genius had been nourished, and where it might have continued, under happier circumstances, to flourish. His position, though one he himself wished for, was not, perhaps, an ideal post for him. But there are few posts in this work-a-day world that are ideal for a man of poetic genius. The man whose character is commensurate with his genius will make his position serve him. Chaucer was a controller of customs, Wordsworth a collector of stamp dues, and yet they kept the fire of poetry alive. And, if it is difficult to find a post for such a genius, it is yet more difficult to mate him suitably. Here too must we subscribe to one of Stevenson's main contentions that Burns's marriage

with Jean Armour, if a generous action, was none the less an error. Whether Burns ever met the woman who could have saved him from himself and his circumstances is highly doubtful; but whoever it was, it was not the facile and yet, at one time, disloyal Jean. The woman to save Burns must have united refinement with tact and devotion, and sufficient intellect to help him in directing his genius (which flagged more from want of guidance and suggestion than from real decay), and with strength of purpose to keep him true to his better resolutions. Had such a woman existed, would she have married Burns? To a woman nurtured in delicacy and refinement, would not the coarseness of the ex-ploughman, with his retinue of ex-mistresses and bastard children, have been more revolting than the poet himself was attractive. A poet is a poet only in his exalted moments, an exciseman, an ex-ploughman, is an exciseman, an ex-ploughman, most of the twenty-four hours.

So we come round very largely to Stevenson's main positions, with the *caveat* we first entered, and to which I believe he would himself subscribe, that there remains something ungracious in the manner of the statement of his positions, "a tone," to quote his own words regarding another of these essays, "unbecoming in one of my stature to one of Burns'."

But Stevenson was, let us remember, as keen and perhaps an even more consistent enemy of cant than Carlyle, for the man who sets himself to denounce cant in set terms is very apt to fall into the cant of the cant denouncer. For cant is as subtle a reptile as the original serpent, and the more vigorously we expel him from our front door, the more quickly he re-enters

by the back. Also his shapes and disguises are legion; for we have the cant of the sinner as well as of the saint, of vice as well as of virtue, of the villain as of the hypocrite, of Lara or Richard III. as well as Pecksniff. So the Agnostic and the Latitudinarian often cant as loudly as the orthodox or the "unco guid"; there is the cant of the Jingo as well as of the Pro-Boer, of Anarchists as well as Popes, Presidents, and Emperors. Then there is the cant of the Æsthete and the Utilitarian, of Pessimists and Optimists, of the Humanists as well as of the cynic. Every sect of whatever colour or complexion has a cant of its own, except the man who is catholic in the true sense of the word, who is free of cant, and he, too, will certainly fall into the cant of catholicity. Cant is the chickweed or the groundsel or the dandelion in the garden of the human heart, and only the most assiduous weeding keeps it down, but never exterminates it.

Now, in his Burns essay, and in that on Villon, and to a less extent in his other essays on literary heroes, Stevenson is attacking what we may call the cant of the hero-worshipper, who, generously, be it admitted, is for ever applying a fresh coat of whitewash to the somewhat mottled image which is the object of his cultus. Now these amiable attempts to justify and exalt the character and conduct of men or women of genius are based, I take it, on a postulate not wholly true, which, not being wholly true, has an element of cant in it. This postulate is that genius and virtue, in our modern conception of the word, are closely co-related, and that they wax and wane together; and the deduction made is that be-

cause a man or woman has proved a genius their character and conduct must be capable of more or less complete justification.

I would, of course, be the last to deny the obviously close connection between genius and character, which is often three-fourths of genius. But that is very different from our being able to discover any close connection between virtuous conduct, in the ordinary acceptation of the word, and artistic success. This is, of course, particularly true of the relations of the sexes. How much poetry has been inspired in male poets by their own legal virtuous spouses? On the other hand what splendid monuments to love illicit, unfulfilled, or even, if Platonic as it is called, extra-matrimonial, have not been raised by poetic genius? From Sappho and Anacreon, Horace and Herrick, Goethe and Heine, up to the severe author of the Inferno, the love that laughs at laws as well as locks has often been a most inspiring motive. To pretend otherwise is to become the victim of a pious and well-meaning form of cant. And it is the converse of this, the pious and well-meaning attempt to white-wash the character of a man of genius because he is a man of genius, that Stevenson is attacking in those two essays. He was too manly himself to put in such a plea as that of making his genius an excuse for wrong-doing.

To those good people who think the ways of Providence ought to be made as plain to them as letters in a horn-book, there must be few mysteries in life more mysterious than the distribution of that magic gift we call genius. It is not assigned, as perhaps they think it ought to be, like the good-conduct

prizes in a Sunday-school. As Nature distributes her seeds in a million different ways and directions, to spring up in the most unexpected places, so the seed of genius falls to the most unlikely and apparently unworthy recipients; and of this no better example could be found than that of François Villon.

In his Villon essay, also, Stevenson assumes a recalcitrant attitude towards those inclined to condone, or even almost justify, the faults and crimes of a man on account of his genius. And, curiously, it seems to me that Stevenson's own natural tendency to sympathise with his subjects on their *artistic* side, makes his manner rather too magisterial towards them on their *moral* side. Little as there may be to be said for Villon as a man, something more might probably have been said in palliation or at least in elucidation (which usually is the same thing) of his undoubted villainy; thief, blackguard, bully, and perhaps murderer, as he was. But the Villon essay is a happier effort on the whole than the Burns, lending itself far more to those sharp and picturesque contrasts of which Stevenson is a master. Villon had in fact a sort of loathsome attraction for Stevenson, and he reproduces him still more brilliantly and dramatically in "A Lodging for the Night"; so brilliantly and dramatically indeed that one is tempted to ask whether any historical literary character has ever been so graphically set before us in any form of fiction.

Passing over the other essays, which it is impossible to notice in detail, but which are all full of interest, while calling for less comment than that on Burns, we come to that which, apparently to the author's own thinking, and certainly to ours, is the crowning suc-

cess of the volume, "Samuel Pepys." Here we find Stevenson in his easiest and best manner, not feeling himself called upon for any protest, except rather in defence of Pepys, who is not weighty enough as an author to awaken literary or artistic prejudices in his favour. So Stevenson feels more at ease with him, treating him with a tolerant familiarity, which in such a case cannot well appear insolent, but which seems to have the effect of drawing the reader into the fire-side warmth of this circle. The other essays in the volume have hardly the touch of finality. One can understand their being expanded, corrected, superseded, but the portraiture of Pepys is so easy and softly touched, yet so firm and solid and individual; there seems enough (like a picture with significant and harmonious, but not crowded accessories), and not too much. We are put so precisely in tune with the man's character that we begin, like Stevenson, to dote on his very weaknesses, and feel quite content that he is no better. The diary itself is such a wonderful self-revelation, that there remains little for the commentator to do. Stevenson skilfully extracts the most telling traits from the diary and composes them into an artistic whole, emphasising, with pithy yet genial criticism and commentary, what is most noteworthy, and bringing out, with a subtle and appreciative humour, the intense humanity of the man. Stevenson, in spite of Puritan traits, is no ascetic, and he admired Pepys' frank and innocent delight in living.

"Equally pleased," he says, "with a watch, a coach, a piece of meat, a tune upon the fiddle, or a fact in hydrostatics, Pepys was pleased yet more by the beauty, the worth, the mirth, or the mere scenic

attitude in life of his fellow-creatures. He shows himself throughout a sterling humanist. Indeed, he who loves himself, not in idle vanity, but with a plenitude of knowledge, is the best equipped also to love his neighbours."

Stevenson praises highly the portrait of Pepys by Hales, and gives us the following admirable transcription into words.

"Here we have a mouth pouting, moist with desires; eyes greedy, protuberant, and yet apt for weeping too; a nose great alike in character and dimensions; and altogether a most fleshly, melting countenance. The face is attractive by its promise of reciprocity. I have used the word *greedy*, but the reader must not suppose that he can change it for the closely kindred one of *hungry*, for there is here no aspiration, no waiting for better things, but an animal joy in all that comes. It could never be the face of an artist; it is the face of a *viveur*—kindly, pleased and pleasing, protected from excess and upheld in contentment by the shifting versatility of his desires. For a single desire is more rightly to be called a lust; but there is health in a variety where one may balance and control another."

This is the latest written essay in this volume, and this last quotation is enough to show that Stevenson was already something like a master in the difficult art—difficult even to the painter himself—of presenting human characters vividly and concretely, with the flush of life in their faces and the blood beating in their veins.

CHAPTER VIII

THE TELLER OF TALES

I PROPOSE now to commit what may seem a slight anachronism, but is in reality none, by treating next the volume of short stories, "New Arabian Nights," although, in point of fact, its publication was some months later than that of "Treasure Island." But the stories in the first-named volume are all, I believe, really earlier work, just as Stevenson was a writer of short stories for years before he attempted, or at least completed, one of any length.

The volume I propose to deal with first was not, if I am to judge by a remark Stevenson once dropped to me, a great favourite of his own, and it is not one of mine either; yet it contains some fine work. The first two stories, "The Suicide Club" and "The Rajah's Diamond," are closely related in style, and are connected by the appearance of the same character, in both. It is these, by their fantastic character and the manner in which the story is divided into several separate adventures, which justify the title of the book. In all of these adventures the *rôle* of the *deus ex machina* is played by a certain Prince Florizel of Bohemia, a character which, though evidently admired by his creator, is to me on the whole rather an irritating presence, one great cause of the unreal, almost phantasmal, effect of these otherwise brilliant and vivid narrations.

"The Suicide Club" is one of the grimmest of stories, as the name indeed suggests, and it is perhaps this said "phantasmal effect" that saves it from being revolting. We feel throughout, not so much as if the things were really happening, as that they are being brilliantly presented and depicted for us; very much, and the effect may be intentional, as an adult feels in reading the "Arabian Nights" themselves. "The Suicide Club," a ghastly and ingenious invention, so far as I know,[1] (though one always seems inclined to father it on De Quincey's "Murder as a Fine Art"), of Stevenson himself, consists of persons who are bent on making their exit from this world, but who lack the nerve themselves to commit the final act. To obviate this difficulty, at every meeting of the club two members are selected by the dealing out of a pack of cards:—and the man to whom the ace of clubs falls must be the executioner—the murderer in fact—and he to whom the ace of spades falls the victim. The President, who is a perpetual official not taking his chance with the others, then gives his instructions, which are such as to make the death appear accidental, and the next night of meeting the executioner returns to take his chance of extinction like the rest. We come thus upon an element in Stevenson's work hardly, if at all, perceptible in his essays, but which is characteristic of much of his fiction, that is, a fondness for the horrible, and especially for scenes of bloodshed, crime, and death. Now, this love of the horrible cannot offhand be described as unnatural, for, apart from the savage and the criminal, it is very evident in

[1] The idea is now believed to be due to Stevenson's gifted cousin, R. A. M. Stevenson, so recently deceased.

children and among the masses, whether in cities or in the country. While executions were held in public in England there was no surer guarantee of a crowd than a hanging. Even the genial Pepys made a point of attending on these occasions. Not long ago in France the representation of an execution in realistic fashion was prohibited as injurious to public morals. The Anglo-Saxon still relishes prize-fighting, pigeon-shooting, and other sports involving suffering and bloodshed, and the bull-fight is still a passion with the Spaniard. It seems, therefore, impossible, however much we deplore this trait in humanity, to stigmatise it fairly and truthfully as abnormal or even morbid. It is a trait that civilisation, religion (in some cases), law, and education tend to repress, but which they, in many cases, merely conceal and overlay. Part of our heritage from a savage, possibly bestial, ancestry, it bursts forth in the drunk, the idiotic and the mad, along with other beast-ward reversions, the moment the more moral and rational restraining faculties are deposed from their position of control. Even in dreams some of these higher faculties are in abeyance and we commit some crimes—but not all—with indifference.

This brings us to an extremely curious point about Stevenson, and leads us somewhat to anticipate our subject-matter; for it is in a later essay or article, "A Chapter on Dreams," that Stevenson confesses his indebtedness to this still-mysterious agency. From a child he had been a great and vivid dreamer, his dreams often taking such frightful shape that he used to awake "clinging in terror to the bedpost." Later in life his dreams continued to be frequent and vivid,

but less terrifying in character and more continuous and systematic. "The Brownies," as he picturesquely names that "subconscious imagination," as the Scientist would call it, that works with such surprising freedom and ingenuity in our dreams, became, as it were, *collaborateurs* in his work of authorship. He declares that they invented plots and even elaborated whole novels, and that, not in a single night or single dream, but continuously, and from one night to another, like a story in serial parts. Long before this essay was written or published, I had been struck by this phantasmal dream-like quality in some of Stevenson's work, which I was puzzled to account for, until I read this extraordinary explanation; for explanation it undoubtedly affords. Anything imagined in a dream would have a tendency, when retold, to retain something of its dream-like character, and I have no doubt one could trace in many instances and distinguish the dreaming and the waking Stevenson, though in others they may be blended beyond recognition. The trouble with the Brownies or the dream-Stevenson was his or their want of moral sense, so that they sometimes presented the waking author with plots which he could not make use of. Of this Stevenson gives an instance in which a complete story of marked ingenuity is vetoed through the moral impossibility of its presentment by a writer so scrupulous (and in some directions he is extremely scrupulous) as Stevenson was. But Stevenson admits that his most famous story, "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," was not only suggested by a dream, but that some of the most important and most criticised points, such as the matter of the powder, were taken direct from the dream. It had been ex-

tremely instructive and interesting had he gone more into detail, and mentioned some of the other stories into which the dream-element entered largely, and pointed out its influence, and would have given us a better clue than we have or now ever can have.

Even in "The Suicide Club," and "The Rajah's Diamond," I seem to feel strongly the presence of the dream-Stevenson. The characters appear, disappear, and reappear with the swiftness of figures in a dream, and one adventure and transformation is piled on the other with the lavish hand of the Dream-god. Then, at certain points, one feels conscious of a certain moral callousness, such as marks the dream-state, as in the murder of Colonel Geraldine's brother, the horror of which seems never fully to come home to us. But, when I speak of their being dream-like, let no one suppose these stories are lacking in vividness, and in startlingly realistic detail; for that is of the very nature of dreaming at its height. The stories referred to are brilliantly imagined and told with perfection of the narrative art, and the characters are graphically portrayed. But portrayal and creation are different things, and while the *dramatis personæ* play their parts with the utmost spirit, while the story proceeds, they do not, as the best creations do, seem to survive this first contact and live on in our minds. This is particularly true of the women. They are well drawn, and play the assigned parts well enough, but they do not, as a rule, make a place for themselves either in our hearts or memories. If there is an exception it is Elvira in "Providence and the Guitar," but we remember her chiefly by the one picture of her falling asleep after the misadventures of the night, at the

supper-table with her head on her husband's shoulder, and her hand locked in his with instinctive, almost unconscious, tenderness. This story, the last in the volume, is to my thinking far the pleasantest, and contains one of Stevenson's most genial creations, Monsieur Léon Berthelini.

"Monsieur Léon Berthelini," he writes in the opening paragraph of the story, "had a great care of his appearance, sedulously suited his deportment to the costume of the hour. He affected something Spanish in his air, and something of the bandit with a flavour of Rembrandt at home. In person he was decidedly small and inclined to be stout; his face was the picture of good-humour; his dark eyes, which were very expressive, told of a kind heart, a brisk, merry nature, and the most indefatigable spirits. If he had worn the clothes of the period you would have set him down for a hitherto undiscovered hybrid between the barber, the innkeeper, and the affable dispensing chemist. But in the outrageous bravery of velvet jacket and flapped hat, with trousers that were more accurately described as fleshings, a white handkerchief cavalierly knotted at his neck, a shock of Olympian curls upon his brow, and his feet shod through all weathers in the slenderest of Molière shoes—you had but to look at him, and you knew you were in the presence of a Great Creature. When he wore an overcoat he scorned to pass the sleeves; a single button held it round his shoulders; it was tossed backwards after the manner of a cloak, and carried with the gait and presence of an Almaviva. I am of opinion that M. Berthelini was nearing forty. But he had a boy's heart, gloried in his finery, and walked through life like a child in a perpetual dramatic

performance. If he were not Almaviva after all, it was not for lack of making believe. And he enjoyed the artist's compensation. If he were not Almaviva, he was sometimes just as happy as though he were."

I confess I find this portraiture very admirable, so vivacious in touch, so clear and spirited in drawing, that the picture shines out before us like a bit of Meissonier, and is lit with a yet kindlier and truer humour than that of Dickens. We have of course met Berthelini before in "The Inland Voyage" under the name of De Vauversin. Stevenson was a keen and penetrative observer of human character, especially of certain types and classes, and anything Bohemian and unconventional always caught his eye and tickled his fancy. In style this passage is highly characteristic, and shows Stevenson evading, with the dexterity of a practised skater, the danger to which that style tends, viz., the excessive dependence on individual felicities, especially in the use of the adjective, which the French maxim says, "is the enemy of the noun." The danger is avoided, here and elsewhere, by the fact that the main effect is produced not by the word itself but by its juxtaposition. Take a term like "outrageous bravery." *Outrageous* itself seems an exaggerated term in such a connection, but "outrageous bravery" has a playfulness in its exaggeration which exactly fits its place. What a happy expression is "cavalierly"! Why we even see the man tying that necktie, neither carefully nor carelessly, neither slovenly nor tidily, but with an offhand mastery, as of a great mind condescending on a trifle, in fact just "cavalierly."

But the *tour de force* of the volume is "A Lodging

for the Night," an adventure of Villon's, beginning with the murder of Thevenin. Here, for instance, are rapid but trenchant pen-and-ink portraits of four of the gang, the pack, one might say, with whom Villon hunted—one being the poet himself.

"The poet," writes Stevenson, "was a rag of a man, dark, little, and lean, with hollow cheeks and thin black locks. He carried his four and twenty years with feverish animation. Greed had made folds about his eyes, evil smiles had puckered his mouth. The wolf and pig struggled together in his face. It was an eloquent, sharp, ugly, earthy countenance. His hands were small and prehensile, with fingers knotted like a cord; and they were continually flickering in front of him in violent and expressive pantomime. As for Tabary, a broad, complacent, admiring imbecility breathed from his squash nose and slobbering lips; he had become a thief, just as he might have become the most decent of burgesses, by the imperious chance that rules the lives of human geese and donkeys.

"On the monk's other hand, Montigny and Thevenin Pensete played a game of chance. About Montigny there clung some flavour of good birth and training, as about a fallen angel; something long, lithe, and courtly in the person; something aquiline and darkling in the face. Thevenin, poor soul, was in great feather; he had done a good stroke of knavery that afternoon in the Faubourg St. Jacques, and all night he had been gaining from Montigny. A flat smile illuminated his face; his bald head shone rosily in a garland of red curls; his little protuberant stomach shook with silent chucklings as he swept in his gains."

This is all much in a painter's manner, and we feel that only a Hogarth could fitly illustrate such a scene of criminality. A little later we have the murder, and then—

"Every one sprang to his feet, but everything was over in two twos. The four living fellows looked at each other in rather ghastly fashion; the dead man contemplating the roof with a singular and ugly leer.

"'My God!' said Tabary; and he began to pray in Latin. Villon broke out into hysterical laughter. He took a step forward and ducked a ridiculous bow to Thevenin, and laughed still louder. Then he sat down suddenly, all of a heap upon a stool, and continued laughing bitterly as though he would shake himself to pieces.

"The murderer Montigny was the first to recover himself, and he picked the dead man's pocket and divided the contents equally with the others.

. . . . . .

"Tabary was the last to help himself; he made a dash at the money, and retired to the other end of the apartment.

"Montigny stuck Thevenin upright in the chair, and drew out the dagger, which was followed by a jet of blood.

"'You fellows had better be moving!' he said, as he wiped the blood on his victim's doublet.

"'I think we had,' returned Villon with a gulp.

"'Damn his fat head!' he broke out. 'It sticks in my throat like phlegm. *What right has a man to have red hair when he is dead?*' and he fell all in a

heap upon the stool, and fairly covered his face with his hands."

I have underlined the startling exclamation of Villon, but it is one of those inspired touches which are the sign-manual of imaginative genius. One does not know whether most to admire the absolute dramatic and psychologic fitness and truth, or the startling, shocking force of the idea expressed. To a creature like Villon, dead in conscience but vividly alive in imagination, it was the picture and not the crime that appealed. And there was a curious disharmony, a ghastly discord, one hardly knows why, between the vivid red of Thevenin's garland of hair and the livid pallor of his dead face. Is it that red hair is what we may call dramatically a comic "property," and seems *outré* in the presence of death's tragedy?

This is all very gruesome, but it is a masterly gruesomeness. The rest of this wonderful little story gradually lightens into a sort of bitter comedy, though Villon's robbing the dead woman is ghastly enough and seems like a touch from one of Stevenson's bad dreams.

I have treated these two stories, "Providence and the Guitar" and "A Lodging for the Night," with some detail, not only because of their high artistic merits — the best things in that vein since Poe — but also because they conveniently mark the comic and tragic poles of the writer's art, the one being in what I call Stevenson's *daylight* manner, and the other in what we may call his *after-dark* style. If Dickens sought to make his readers either laugh or cry, Stevenson's seems to be rather desirous to titillate you with half-mocking paradox and a curious genial

irony, or to thrill you with the vividly horrible. Still we see a trait of childhood, which dearly loves to be amused, but yet more to be thrilled by being held as it were over the verge of some abyss of horror.

We now come to the book through which, as by a single bound, Stevenson suddenly crossed the often impassable boundary betwixt appreciation by a select and cultured few and general recognition and popularity. This was his famous book of adventure, "Treasure Island," appearing first as "The Sea Cook" in a boys' paper where it made no great stir. But, on its publication in volume form, with the vastly better title, the book at once "boomed," as the phrase goes, to an extent then, in 1882, almost unprecedented. The secret of this immense success may almost be expressed in a phrase by saying that it is a book, like "Gulliver's Travels," "The Pilgrim's Progress," and "Robinson Crusoe" itself, for all ages. Although a pure book of adventure, written for boys with a boy for its hero, it has literary and artistic attractions and interests which make it fascinating not only to men but even to women, though there is not a spark of love-interest between its covers; and most people who read it once read it again and again. In my own case it is one of the few stories I cared to read twice, and I have read it in a German translation and found it as *ergreifend*[1] as ever. *Ergreifend* seems to me, indeed, one of the best terms to apply to the book. The author grips you, like the Ancient Mariner, and holds you fascinated all the time. In a sense the book is a *rechauffé* of half-a-dozen previous books of adventure, and Stevenson with the utmost nonchalance

[1] = Engrossing or absorbing.

tells us so himself. But, like all great robbers, from Shakespeare downwards, Stevenson adds something more precious which he did not steal. For terse and vigorous and unflagging narrative power "Treasure Island" may be equalled, but cannot be excelled. As a mere piece of literature it is of course head and shoulders over the ordinary book of adventure; but its distinctive merit which seems to me to put it into a higher category than even "Robinson Crusoe," is the masterly delineation of the almost Napoleonic villain "Long John Silver." I say Napoleonic, because it seems to me that in John Silver we have qualities which on a higher and greater stage might have made such a Jupiter Scapin. The same superb indifference to right and wrong marks the ex-buccaneer and the quondam "Scourge of Europe." And John Silver meets his Wellington in Dr. Livesey and is beaten, and yet carries, as Napoleon did, what we may call all the stage honours. The doctor, like Wellington, seems rather the agent in the hands of a vindicating Providence, an embodiment of justice, and bulks no more in comparison with Silver than a David compared in stature with a Goliath. Like Milton's Satan, Silver takes with him the suffrages of the reader. He fascinates us, as he does Jim Hawkins, not only by his masterly villainy, but by a certain urbanity that is almost Olympian, and he seems to play with the lives of men with the same light unabashed enjoyment with which a child kills flies. In spite of his crutch and stump he seems to tower over the others like a bad god, who jovially plays at skittles with human lives. Revolting as Silver's actions are, we never quite hate him as we ought. His *aplomb* keeps us in per-

petual good humour. Whether a man can be as bad as Silver, so to speak, with such a good grace, one may well doubt. But that he, like the Master of Ballantrae, is one of the most striking figures in fiction, admits, I think, of no cavil. And, strange as it may seem, the more one studies these masterly and masterful villains, the more one tends to class them with such high company as Iago, Mephistopheles, and Milton's Satan. I know that is a great deal to say, but I say it with conviction. There is certainly nothing in Scott that comes into the same class. His Bertrams and Roderick Dhus and Bois Gilberts seem melodramatic and conventional in comparison. This I know is treason, but I believe it to be true. One sometimes thinks Stevenson must have signed a new kind of pact with the devil and been made a burgess of hell, so alarming an intimacy he seems to have with evil.

But then comes the limitation. John Silver is really the one character of the book, the Hamlet of the play. The other characters are all carefully differentiated, but they fall almost as far short in degree of real vitality in comparison with Silver, as they do in point of importance and bulk in the reader's eye. Jim Hawkins, the nominal hero, is just in Chadband's phrase a "human boy," except when he is rather supernaturally cool and acute. Even Dr. Livesey is somewhat wooden, and the other characters are like planets revolving round the resplendent villainy of Silver. Of course the blind Pew, with the almost sepulchral tapping of his stick, and Captain Flint himself, to a less degree, are ineffaceable images and memories for the reader.

At first sight it may seem curious that Stevenson, who so despised the modern racing and toiling for

wealth, should have been so fascinated by the notion of treasure-hunting that he not only devotes the whole of this, certainly one of his best books, entirely to this pursuit, but frequently harks back upon the same idea. I cannot but think it is in part the inveterate moralist that lies in his fibre that makes such themes attractive to him. As in the story of "The Rajah's Diamond" there lies in "Treasure Island" the moral that the desire and pursuit of great wealth reduces man to a savage, a criminal, and a ruffian. Yet I cannot say that the moral is very impressively driven home, and the escape of John Silver scot-free, after all his hideous crimes, seems a notable defeat of earthly justice. Yet his escape seems to me truer to life and art than his condign punishment would have been. It is these supreme rascals that sometimes seem finally to dodge the punishment that seems so surely to befall lesser criminals. A man of his adroitness could play the rôle of respectability and innocence to perfection, and might well die in the odour of sanctity, and face death and judgment with the same effrontery with which he confronted danger and perpetrated crime in his life. One asks oneself, what could God Himself make of such an indomitably bad soul; and one even fancies the devil regarding him askance and fearing to be juggled out of his bad pre-eminence.

In Stevenson's next book, the "Silverado Squatters," we find a return to the manner and style of "The Inland Voyage" and "Travels with a Donkey." Except from the biographical point of view, it being an account of his life in California, shortly after his marriage, in a ruined house at a deserted mining station, the book does not call for special remark.

It records one of those experiments in living, of which he made so many, ending with his patriarchal and almost princely establishment in Samoa. The book is written with his unfailing vivacity and charm, and with more ripeness and absence of effort than his earlier books of the same kind. But it reveals no new aspects or powers, in the author, and so, delightful reading as it is, it need not detain us.

We now come to what may certainly be regarded as the chief *crux* for the critic of Stevenson, his second story of volume length, "Prince Otto." With what I may call the ultra-Stevensonian, this story is regarded as Stevenson's masterpiece; but to more sober admirers and to the general public it seems to contain elements of weakness and failure. In detail the book is one of the most brilliant he ever penned, as it is the one on which he bestowed the most pains, and yet as a whole it seems ineffective.

The scene is laid in a bygone German principality to which Stevenson gives the name Grünewald, and the hero and heroine, if such they may be called, are Prince Otto and his wife, the Princess Seraphina. The prince leaves the affairs of state to the princess and her favourite minister Grondemark, and goes out hunting and in search of casual adventures. He is a mild edition of Prince Florizel, having the same contempt for the duties to which he is born, and the same itch for extraneous adventure and for playing the *deus ex machina* in outside affairs. But, amiable and delightful as he is, he does not command our respect as Florizel does by his high courage and imperturbable nerve. We come very near loving Otto, that "prince in Dresden china," as he is called by

one of the other characters, but it is, I hold, impossible not to feel contempt for his lack of nerve and decision at critical moments, where to the ordinary mind "his tameness is shocking to see." At one moment one is clapping one's hands to applaud his admirable speech, but the next one has an unutterable longing to kick him into action. If he would only box the princess's ears and kick Grondemark down the palace stairs, we could forgive him all. The sober fact is that the prince is spoiled as a centre of interest for the normal human mind by too large an infusion of philosophy of the peculiar paradoxical Stevensonian kind. The paradox in the present instance—and a favourite one with Stevenson—seems to be that the apparently important things, such as the governing of a state, are not worth attending to, while going a-hunting and eavesdropping among one's subjects is. No doubt the main motive of the comedy—for comedy the book is from first to last—is the reconciliation of Otto and Seraphina; but it is a consummation in which the unregenerate reader takes too little interest. A reconciliation between two pieces of Dresden china can have no interest for mortal man. Seraphina, like Otto, is a pure comedy character who cannot possibly in the nature of things do anything seriously interesting. If she had even gone wrong with Grondemark, or seemed in serious danger of doing so, the reader would pluck up some interest in her. But we are assured from the outset that she is innocent, and we know that her dagger will only inflict a scratch on Grondemark. Even in that most beautiful description of her flight, it is not the princess who interests us, but the Nature by which she is surrounded; and so

I am much afraid we must add Seraphina to the list of Stevenson's women-failures. Yet she is subtly drawn and by no means unnatural; still she remains a well-behaved marionette, whose wires the author skilfully manipulates all the time. Very different is it with the naughty Countess von Rosen, the real mistress of Grondemark. Her sparkling naughtiness, her zest for intrigue, the coquettish treatment of the prince—whose very virtue is made to look foolish—make the character thoroughly elastic and alive. The conception is not new, but it is sustained with the greatest vivacity, and takes the reader's eye for the time off everything else.[1] The reader—the male reader at any rate—feels the witchery of the woman, and the prince's fidelity and coldness only succeed in placing him in the light of a prig. Morally wrong as it may seem, we had rather he justified his manhood than his rectitude. Had he yielded but a moment and planted one passionate kiss on the roguish lips of the fascinating countess, we would forgive him all his St. Anthony airs, and take some interest in the virtue that had shown itself assailable. It would have given a gusto to the reconciliation had the prince had some real lapse to confess, and not a catalogue of peccadilloes. In a word, the prince lacks that touch of the devil, or at any rate of unruly human passion, which is required to make a character thoroughly alive and interesting. Stevenson is the last man in the world who ought to have drawn a prig, and yet he has come very near doing so in Prince Otto.

[1] Since writing these lines I have seen Prince Otto staged as a genteel comedy, and then the Countess in the able hands of Miss Marion Terry easily asserted her dramatic supremacy.

But, when we turn from the work considered as a story, to look at it as literature and as the artistic and almost symbolic exposition of certain of Stevenson's favourite philosophical positions, we find it full of beauty and even of wisdom. Nowhere has Stevenson described Nature and the effects of Nature on the human heart and mind more beautifully, more poetically, and yet more truthfully and exactly. The flight of the Princess in her thin ball-dress through the woods by night will compare with any similar episode I know of either in Stevenson's own work or elsewhere.

The mob break into Mittwalden Palace, and the Princess must flee for her life:—

"Sped by these dire sounds and voices, the Princess scaled the long garden, skimming like a bird the starlit stairways; crossed the Park which was at this place narrow; and plunged upon the farther side into the rude shelter of the forest. So at a bound, she left the discretion and the cheerful lamps of palace evenings; and ceased utterly to be a sovereign lady: and, falling from the whole height of civilisation, ran forth into the woods a ragged Cinderella. She went direct before her through an open tract of forest, full of brush and birches, and where the starlight guided her; and beyond that again must thread the columned blackness of a pine-grove joining overhead the thatch of its long branches. At that hour the place was breathless; a horror of night like a presence occupied that dungeon of the wood; and she went groping, knocking against the boles; her ear between whiles strained to aching, and yet unrewarded.

"But the slope of the ground was upward and encouraged her; and presently she issued on a rocky

hill that stood forth above the sea of forest. All around were other hilltops, big and little; sable vales of forest between; overhead the open heaven and the brilliancy of countless stars; and along the western sky the dim forms of mountains. The glory of the great night laid hold upon her; her eyes shone with stars; she dipped her sight into the coolness and brightness of the sky as she might have dipped her wrist into a spring; and her heart at that ethereal shock began to move more soberly. The sun that sails overhead, ploughing into gold the fields of daylight azure and uttering the signal to man's myriads, has no word apart for man the individual; and the moon like a violin only praises or laments our private destiny. The stars alone, cheerful whisperers, confer quietly with each of us like friends; they give ear to our sorrows smilingly, like wise old men, rich in tolerance; and by their double scale, so small to the eye, so vast to the imagination, they keep before the mind the double character of man's nature and fate."

There are few passages in what professes to be poetry so truly and genuinely poetic, so animated with pure poetic feeling, without rising out of reality, as the concluding sentence regarding the several influences of sun, moon, and stars. A discursive poet, such as Swinburne, would have spread such ideas over pages of reiterative verse.

Yet I cannot help feeling a regret that such fine work is thrown away on what I must honestly hold to be an unworthy subject. The music of the spheres is rather too sublime an accompaniment for this genteel-comedy Princess. A touch of Offenbach would seem more appropriate. Then, even in comedy, the hero

must not be the butt. Time after time Stevenson makes Otto amiably ridiculous (a far lower position than the angrily ridiculous, from which a character may recover), and still expects us to be interested in his second love-making to his wife—a part undignified enough in itself. The leading character of a play or novel must hold our respect in one direction or another, either morally or intellectually, or by mere force of personality. Thus John Silver in "Treasure Island," like Iago in "Othello," like Richard the Third and other wicked heroes, secures us by his intellectual and personal force. Stevenson puts his hero from the outset in the most contemptible position that human man can be put into, in that, viz., of being ousted by another man from the esteem and intimacy of his own wife; and I am not sure that the very innocence of his wife's intrigue does not make Otto's position the more humiliating. Where a married woman has a serious *liaison* it may not really reflect on her husband's qualities; it may be sheer viciousness on her part or an uncontrollable infatuation for the rival. But when she degrades her husband deliberately and without any such motive of passion, the degradation is really more severe. And this was Otto's position. From sheer incapacity to retain it, he loses the regard, affection and esteem of his wife. He goes eavesdropping among the peasantry, and has to sit silent while his wife's honour is coarsely impugned. After that I hold it is impossible for Stevenson to rehabilitate his hero, and, with all his brilliant effects, I think he fails. I take "Prince Otto" to be Stevenson's Balaclava Charge, his most brilliant but at the same time his least successful effort.

CHAPTER IX

BRIGHT VERSE AND GRIM FABLE

IT is pleasant to turn from a work in which, to our thinking, a vast amount of labour and ability is, to a large extent, lost, to one in which the success is so unequivocal and assured as is that of the delightful "Child's Garden of Verses." This book has the enormous advantage of being unique, so far as I know, in English literature. There are enough of verses *for* children and *about* children, but none that represent childhood so accurately, as seen from the adult standpoint, and yet still perfectly remembered and understood. Reading this book we live our childhood over again. The child-psychology is so startlingly exact, that it brings back to us much that we had otherwise forgotten and lost. We see again our own tiny figure in short frocks, and, with a delicate humour and exquisite regret, we ourselves re-enact the joys and sorrows of child-life. As has already been remarked, Stevenson retained much of the child in his nature; his recollections of his childhood seem miraculously lucid and sharp, and he positively never lapses from childish *naïveté*. Stevenson is always, in the best sense of the word, an impressionist. That is, he draws things, not as he knows them to be on reflection, but as they appear to him, and that is the

method of a child. Here, for instance, is an excellent piece of impressionism :—

> "The Dog and the Plough, and the Hunter and all,
> And the star of the sailor, and Mars,
> These shone in the sky, and *the pail by the wall*
> *Would be half full of water and stars.*"

To the child the stars in the bucket are as real as the stars in the sky, and this is impressionism, to render a thing just as it appears to the senses, and it is this quality in Stevenson that often gives his descriptive touches such startling force and vividness. The phrase we quoted before about the lamplighter "knocking another luminous hole in the dusk" is an excellent example of this. Very difficult is it to select amid so much that is charming; but here is the child's notion of

THE COW.

> "The friendly cow, all red and white,
> I love with all my heart;
> She gives me cream with all her might
> To eat with apple-tart.
>
> She wanders lowing here and there,
> And yet she cannot stray,
> All in the pleasant open air,
> The pleasant light of day.
>
> And blown by all the winds that pass
> And wet with all the showers,
> She walks among the meadow grass
> And eats the meadow flowers."

It would be impossible to describe better with all the resources of language an English cow browsing in a lush June or July meadow. It is, indeed, not *a*

cow but *the* cow. She has the meadow all to herself, and she is so well fed that she does not seem seriously to eat the grass, but strolls about wantonly and leisurely chewing perhaps a single cowslip and a few buttercups. Then how naïvely described is her place in the child's scheme of Providence!—

> "She gives me cream with all her might
> To eat with apple-tart."

The next volume by Stevenson was written in conjunction with his wife, Fanny van de Grift Stevenson, under the title of "The Dynamiter," but is now called "More Arabian Nights — The Dynamiter," in order to bring it into line, as it were, with "The New Arabian Nights," to which it is on the whole an inferior and disappointing sequel; and the most interesting question regarding it is how much is real Robert Louis and how much Fanny van de Grift. Mrs. Stevenson says very categorically, "All the stories are mine, except the 'Explosive Bomb.'" It would be ungallant in the extreme to throw the slightest doubt on the accuracy of this statement; but it lands us in a difficulty for which we would fain seek a solution; for, if this shortest of the tales be really all Stevenson's own share in the book, it seems nothing short of a fraud on the public to have appended his name to it at all. But when we turn to the stories themselves we find them so saturated with the characteristic Stevensonian philosophy and so tinctured with his style, though seldom or ever touching his highest levels, that it seems well-nigh impossible to believe literally that the "Explosive Bomb" represents his total contribution to the work. If Mrs.

Stevenson composed these stories quite independently, she possesses narrative and inventive powers little inferior to those of her husband. "The Destroying Angel," though highly fantastic and putting a strain on our credulity, is written with great power, and such a passage as that describing the starvation camp of Mormon emigrants, might well be culled out as one of the most effective in Stevenson's works. Had Mrs. Stevenson equal literary faculties to those of her husband, or did he directly influence and inspire the work? Very instructive in this respect is a remark once made to me by Stevenson's mother apropos of "The Wrong Box," the first work published by him in collaboration with his stepson, Lloyd Osbourne. It seems that the whole story was actually written by Osbourne, though no doubt talked over by him with Stevenson. But Stevenson went over the book later, putting in touches of his own, and his mother went on to say that he had an extraordinary faculty for thus giving the whole work so strong a smack of his own style, that the critics were often quite wrong when they attempted to distinguish Stevenson's own work from those of his *collaborateurs*. But it is more when we regard the books as a whole that we perceive the difference and are able to make at least this generalisation, that the books in which he had a *collaborateur* are never quite his best, and seldom make that substantial addition to his fame which is usually made by those which bear his sole name on the title-page. There is indeed usually a great difference between master and pupil, and the pictures in which Rubens alone worked *must* be superior to those which he merely touched up, although the latter

may seem to have the Rubens mannerisms quite as markedly as the former. Thus, I doubt not, we may fairly class "The Dynamiter" as a work of the Stevenson school.

One aim, however, it has throughout and, curiously, that culminates in Stevenson's own story of the "Explosive Bomb," that is, thoroughly to expose the mingled folly, cruelty, conceit, vanity, and cowardice of the dynamiter and, indeed, the anarchist generally. If the crowned heads of Europe want an antidote to Nihilism and kindred evils, they cannot do better than circulate the "Dynamiter" broadcast throughout their dominions in the vernacular. Nothing kills like ridicule, and the figures of Zero and Macguire, so brilliantly satirised, if the bare truth can be called satire, effect a true *reductio ad absurdum* of dynamitism. It may of course be mere coincidence, but it is very nearly true to say that with this appearance in *literature* the dynamiter, as an agent, so far as Great Britain is concerned, stepped out of *history*. The effect of translation at least into French, Italian, Spanish, and Russian might be tried!

But, as though he had learned a lesson from Zero and bettered it, Stevenson himself now successfully planted a bomb.

"Treasure Island" had captured the better-class reading public and juveniles of all orders who could get hold of the book. But to the masses generally he was still unknown. The British workman, who reads his Carlyle and Ruskin and Huxley, took no interest in such a light horseman as the author of "New Arabian Nights" and "A Child's Garden of Verses." He was hardly even a name to them, and quite unknown to

those still less cultured. This public of the masses lay, it seemed, out of his reach, as indifferent as a whale to paper-darts, and yet all on a sudden he harpooned the monster. Since Tennyson wrote the "Northern Cobbler" no man of high and refined literary power has struck home to the popular conscience as did Stevenson with his terrible parable of "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." Published as a "shilling shocker," as the term for a cheap sensational novel goes, and sold chiefly at railway book-stalls, the fame of the book spread with electric speed and sent Stevenson's name echoing through the four quarters of the globe. It captured the press and even the pulpit, and seemed to travel like a bullet straight to the heart. We all suddenly —except those who knew it already—discovered we had a Mr. Hyde in our bosoms.

Founded, as has been said, on a dream, and that a highly unpleasant one, the story—for it is half reality, half fable—sets forth how an outwardly excellent and blameless physician, Dr. Jekyll, discovers in the course of some experiments a drug or mixture of drugs, on taking which his personality is at once changed into that of a human monster, with all the worst human and inhuman passions. To this personality he gives the name of Edward Hyde, and in this character he is capable of any crime, and plunges into the wildest orgies. In his own person Dr. Jekyll had been in the habit of secretly indulging his lower passions, and Mr. Hyde is made up of these passions deprived of the control of the higher faculties. Dr. Jekyll contains Mr. Hyde, but Mr. Hyde has got rid of the Dr. Jekyll element until he

again drinks the potion. There are some curiously subtle psychologic touches in the depiction of these two personalities. Edward Hyde is younger and smaller than Dr. Jekyll, signifying that this part of Jekyll's nature had been long suppressed and held in abeyance and was starting on its career later than the higher self. The figure of Hyde is deformed and repulsive, and all normal persons feel an instinctive abhorrence for him. This affords him only a fiendish pleasure and a desire to snatch pleasure for himself at the expense of pain in others. With indulgence in such passion he grows in stature and strength and in daring wickedness. When he has sated himself for a time, prudence and self-interest induce him to retire to the disguise and shelter of the higher personality of Dr. Jekyll, which otherwise he despises. Dr. Jekyll in turn suffers acutest remorse for the crimes of Hyde, redoubles his acts of kindness, and strives ever to undo the evil wrought by Edward Hyde. But now a terrible state of matters comes about. He finds himself involuntarily, and without using the drug, relapsing into the character of Hyde, from which he can only recover by the use of stronger and stronger doses, to the danger of life itself. Finally, while in the character of Hyde, he commits an unprovoked, shocking, and barbarous murder, which has been witnessed. With the utmost difficulty he succeeds in taking refuge in the semblance of Dr. Jekyll, when a new and appalling danger and terror presents itself. The stock of the essential ingredient of the potion runs low. He procures a further quantity and mixes it eagerly, only to find that the usual transformation no longer takes place. He now guesses, in despairing

terror, that it was the presence of some unknown impurity that rendered the first powder effectual. He has only, at most, sufficient of the original to procure one transformation, and then he must for ever lapse into the murderer Hyde. He sets his house in order for the last time, making Edward Hyde his heir, and then sits down to write his statement of the case, which thus concludes, speaking of Hyde:—

"And indeed the doom that is closing on us both has already changed and crushed him. Half-an-hour from now, when I shall again and for ever re-indue that hated personality, I know I shall sit shuddering and weeping in my chair, or continue, with the most strained and fear-struck ecstasy of listening, to pace up and down this room (my last earthly refuge), and give ear to every sound of menace. Will Hyde die on the scaffold? or will he find the courage to release himself at the last moment? God knows! I am careless; this is my true hour of death, and what is to follow concerns another than myself. Here then, as I lay down the pen, and proceed to seal up my confession, I bring the life of that unhappy Harry Jekyll to an end."

So we leave the miserable Hyde sitting under the shadow of the gallows and shudderingly awaiting his fate.

It is, I believe, impossible for any human being to read this terrifying, this appalling apologue unmoved. The good and the evil, the virtuous and the wicked, the innocent and the depraved alike stand shuddering at the brink of that abyss into which Dr. Jekyll has disappeared, and into which the wretched Hyde seems about to plunge, as into the Bottomless Pit. No conscience is so unsmirched or so hardened that it can fearlessly face this awful presentment of this degrada-

tion and destruction of a human soul. To the best, as to the worst of us, rings in our ears the damning words of the prophet, "Thou art the man!" A cold terror clutches at our hearts, more frightful than the very Trump of Judgment. As in Browning's "Easter Day," the Day of Judgment seems already upon us, not imposed from without, but a still more dreadful assize in our own breast. If a man could be terrified into goodness, surely Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde would do it! But it is one thing to open a man's eyes to his danger, to tell him his house is on fire, or that he is plague-stricken, but quite another to provide him with a fire-escape or a specific. Stevenson seems in this book to be like a man arousing you in the night with a cry of fire, and at the same time informing you that your retreat is already cut off, the water frozen at the main, no fire-escape within twenty miles, and that you will certainly break your neck if you jump from the windows. "Thank you kindly for nothing," you cry. "I had much better have died asleep in the smoke." Like Bunyan, even perhaps more effectually, Stevenson convinces us that we are in the City of Destruction. But he leads us only to the Slough of Despond, and there incontinently leaves us; and here, I think—and I am not alone in thinking—we have a grievance. "What right," we cry, "have you to point out to us these blue plague-spots on our souls and make us miserable when we might at least have been thoughtlessly light-hearted, when you have no remedy to propose?" As far as I understand, Dr. Jekyll is from first to last a fly caught fast in the Devil's web, whose struggles only serve to bind him more securely. There is no point indicated in the narrative at which

he could escape, no helping hand is held out to him on earth or from heaven. Is it, then, not the same with us? Can any of us declare we have never touched with hand or foot this Devil's web? Dare we say now that none of its subtle meshes entangle us? But has the Devil a more dangerous weapon in his armoury than despair? Yet this, Stevenson deliberately presents him with. The apologue, indeed, breathes a pessimism of the worst kind, representing the evil part of our nature completely and irresistibly triumphant over the good. This surely is to put the human spirit back into a worse dungeon than Calvinism itself? There is, in fact, in Stevenson, despite his courage, his zest in living, his sweetness and broad humanity, a deep vein of pessimism (may we set it down partly to his diseased and ever-ailing body?), and here it runs its blackest.

In palliation of the offence which this book offers there are perhaps two things to be said. In the first place it was not intended as a complete and general parable of the Soul's history, like "The Pilgrim's Progress," but purely as a scarecrow, so to speak, to alarm those apt to indulge, especially in secret, some evil passion or habit. To any one just entering on such a course the book might be a most effective deterrent. In the second place, we observe that Dr. Jekyll's virtues are of a somewhat questionable and negative kind, and arise largely from the desire to be esteemed and respected. He has no attachment, no high passion, no real self-sacrifice, and such half-virtues as he has, readily betrayed him into the hands of his evil proclivities. So we hope this is no universal case, only a piece of pathologic psychology.

It is well also to remember that the story is founded on a vision of the night, a veritable nightmare, and was not wholly conceived in Stevenson's waking moments.

"The Brownies" liked strong effects, and the effect was too striking for Stevenson to suffer it to be lost; and from the literary point of view, while it does not show Stevenson in his highest and noblest flights, it forms one of his greatest, if also one of his coarsest, *tours de force*. One may, indeed, hoist Stevenson with his own petard, and declare that we find in him as an author a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and that here, as in the "*beastly* Body-snatcher," as he himself called it, in "The Suicide Club," in "The Ebb-Tide," and even in parts of "The Master of Ballantrae" and "The Wrecker," we have rather more than we care for of his Mr. Hyde. The Hyde-Stevenson, if we may so denominate that side of Stevenson the author, is that which busies itself with unmistakable zest with the criminal, the sanguinary, the morbid, and that which is to many the revolting, which I am inclined in part to attribute to the so-called Brownies of his dream-life.

But how do we reconcile this element with the kindly, generous, modest, peaceable conduct of the man himself? Partly it seems to me founded on the survival of a childlike delight in the horrible for its own sake. But in part, also, it arises from the philosophy in which his age was steeped. I mean the "Nature-red-in-tooth-and-claw" philosophy set agoing by Darwinism and expounded by Spencer, through which we were taught to see in the world of nature nothing better than a vast, sanguinary, and cruel battle-field, where the weak are the sport and the

victims of the strong and the cruel. This view of nature naturally colours our view of human life, and those who see in nature itself nothing better than a battle-field, see little else in human life also, and civilisation becomes for us a mere artificial screen on which fair figures are painted, while behind it man is busy as ever undoing and, in a true sense, murdering his fellow-men.

It was this view, coupled with his instinctive Bohemianism, that gave Stevenson his huge distaste for modern civilised life, which seemed to him tame, mean, and hypocritical. Instead of waging open war like the savage and the soldier, we are busy destroying and injuring each other in a thousand meaner ways. We are not even bushrangers and highway-robbers; we are swindlers and sharpers, pickpockets and cut-purses; we drive each other into crime, and put on ourselves the black cap to give sentence. Swallowing with too little thought the old Malthus fallacy on which the whole philosophy of Darwinism and of Spencer stands, like a pyramid on its apex, Stevenson says, in effect: "Since this mutual destruction and struggle is the law of the game, let us at least do it like men and even, if possible, like gentlemen. If our mission is to cut each other's throats, let us do it frankly and fairly. If not chivalrously like knights, honestly and without pretence like decent men."

Thus, by a logical over-driving of this idea, he arives pretty much at the paradox that one can hardly be better employed than in taking life. Hence the rifeness of homicide in nearly all his books, and the lightheartedness with which he thins out his *dramatis personæ* with an ingenious variety of lethal means and

methods, from the dagger, sword, pistol, and gun, to the spine-cracking blow of John Silver's crutch. If Stevenson were to be held morally responsible for the murders and other homicides he commits in his pages, he would rival the record of the most notorious criminal. There are chapters in his books which run with blood, like a shambles. Yet, curiously enough, the reader bears all this with a wonderfully good stomach, for vividly and realistically represented as all this blood-letting certainly is, the movement of the narrative is usually in these cases so brisk, the current of action so swift, that, as in an actual fight, we have really no time to lament the fallen, or to sicken amid so much carnage.

Unlike Zola, Stevenson's object is not to disgust, but to interest, and to make his characters fitly and vivaciously play their parts. Thus, although his material might often be termed "sensational," his treatment is not so. In all Stevenson writes, however gruesome the subject, and however far he may push his imaginative realism, we have usually a sense of a certain artistic restraint, a feeling that he is keeping steadily to the inside edge of truth and not wildly venturing on the outer edge. A murder for instance, especially one on which the whole plot of a novel turns, would be by a more commonplace writer used as an occasion of some display; but it is not so with Stevenson. He lets it happen swiftly, surely, perhaps silently, as no doubt it happens for the most part in real life. Of this there is an admirable example in "Kidnapped," the first of Stevenson's historical romances, which, in order of issue, immediately follows the weird parable of Jekyll and Hyde.

CHAPTER X

STEVENSON AND SCOTT

WHEN Stevenson ventured into the domain of the historical novel, and especially when he laid his scene in Scotland, partly in the Highlands and partly in the Lowlands, and, in particular, when he selected the period of time immediately following the Rebellion of 1745, he was taking a very venturesome course and boldly challenging comparison with no less a person than the author of "Waverley" and "Rob Roy." It was an act of daring perhaps only paralleled in our days by Tennyson's venturing so near the domain of Shakespeare in his blank-verse dramas, and especially "Queen Mary," which might almost claim a place as sequel to "Henry the Eighth." And, if anything, the approximation was in Stevenson's case the closer of the two. But as to which of the two moderns best justified his boldness there can be no doubt.

Tennyson's dramas added little or nothing to his reputation, and, with one possible exception, must remain closet-dramas, as Byron's have already become. On the other hand, Stevenson struck out a fresh and fitting channel for his romantic genius, and gave us during the next eight years, which were all that remained to him, a series of *Scottish historical romances*, ending with the fine fragments of "Weir of Hermiston" and "St. Ives," which form undoubtedly the most

important contribution to that class of literature since the death of Scott himself.

It is to make no unimportant or superfine distinction to say, that Stevenson was a follower or rival rather than an imitator of Scott, and I always hold, in spite of the frequently close resemblance of their *material*, that they have more points of contrast than of similarity.

What they have in common is chiefly this resemblance in material and subject, their inborn love and faculty for the telling of tales, their fondness of movement, action, fighting, and adventure, their partiality for their villains, and, in point of defect, a laxity in construction of plot and difficulty in portraying the higher forms of female character.

On the other hand, the differences are perhaps more numerous and striking. Scott was a great careless, unconscious genius, with small critical faculty either with regard to his own work or that of others. He had absolutely no message and no philosophy of his own. His is the outlook on life of a sane, in a sense, ordinary mind that had never been disturbed by speculation on the deeper problems of life, philosophy, or religion. His religion and morals are those of the upright, healthy, pure-minded country gentleman, to whom Dissent and enthusiasm are vulgar and ridiculous. His "morality," if unimpeachable, is also strictly conventional to the very borders of Pharisaism, for it takes something like a Pharisee to repent himself of so harmless and pathetic a creation as Effie Deans.

For the novelist who is to reflect life faithfully for us some of these may be ranked as advantages. If a novelist is also a philosopher or a moralist, or a reli-

gious or political enthusiast, his pages do not impartially reflect life, but return it somewhat tinted or warped by the author's views, which, if they are interesting and attractive to one reader, may be repellent, or anti-pathetic or unintelligible to half-a-dozen others, so that he tends to limit the circle of his readers. Yet in all the very greatest work, in Shakespeare, in Milton, in Goethe, in the Greek tragedies, in Dante, even in Burns, we have some of these elements, we have, in a word, a touch of *Tendenz* in some form or other. But these breathe a loftier, rarer, more intellectual and spiritual atmosphere than Scott. Similarly Scott is no master of the higher and intenser forms of passion, and, even in his poetry, never reaches the true "lyrical cry."

Now, Stevenson has many of these things that are wanting or defective in Scott. He has his philosophy of life, he is beyond remedy a moralist, even when his morality is of the kind which he happily calls "tail-foremost," or, as we may say, inverted morality. Stevenson is, in fact, much more of a thinker than Scott, and he is also much more of the conscious artist, questionable advantage as that sometimes is. He has also a much cleverer, acuter mind than Scott, also a questionable advantage, as genius has no greater enemy than cleverness, and there is really no greater descent than to fall from the style of genius to that of cleverness, and yet even Shakespeare not infrequently falls down this trap-door. But Stevenson was too critical and alive to misuse his cleverness, and it is generally employed with great effect as in the diabolical ingenuities of a Silver or a Master of Ballantrae.

Yet another positive quality of Stevenson's, his

admirable style, carries also its own danger. The novelist with a style (of which Scott was innocent as a babe) is like a man who wears his sword in a ball-room. He is under two dangers, that of using it without proper occasion, or of tripping over it. Also, a beautiful style, like high finish in a picture, while it may enhance the book as a work of art, is apt rather to detract from the sense of reality. "Prince Otto" is, perhaps, the *best written* of Stevenson's books, but it is by no means his *best book*. (Of course, for the short story and the essay, and books like "The Inland Voyage," style is as indispensable as it is in poetry.) Stevenson seems, in a sense, a weakling compared with the easy unconscious strength and stature of Scott; but a well-armed weakling, who makes the best of his skill, may accomplish what a giant, capable of blundering, may fail in.

In one sense Stevenson does not even belong to the school of Scott, but rather to that of Poe, Hawthorne, and the Brontës, in that he aims more at concentration and intensity than at the easy, quiet breadth of Scott. He is not so strong as Scott to handle simultaneously a number of characters; but of the working of a solitary mind, or still more in the single combat of two characters Stevenson is an almost unrivalled master.

In one point these two, the giant and the stripling, are very equally matched, in their knowledge and command of the Scottish dialect, and certainly from what I know from those entitled to judge, if there is an inferiority it is not on Stevenson's side.

One more point and we must leave this interesting comparison. Scott's characters are more solid, more

concrete, more convincing, more thoroughly flesh and blood and of a piece with ordinary experience than Stevenson's. He is greatest of all in *genre*, in Bailie Nichol Jarvie, Edie Ochiltree, Andrew Fairservice, Cuddy Headrigg, and only in this province can he compare with Shakespeare. Never does Scott approach the sublime, nor does he strike the true tragic note, not even in the "Bride of Lammermoor," which only succeeds in making one miserable, while a true tragedy should leave one in a state of spiritual exaltation, which turns to a sort of haughty pleasure beyond the region of tears. The Master of Ravenswood is a character of far too slight moral and intellectual content to play the leading rôle in a tragedy. A scene-shifter cast for the part of Hamlet could not be less effective. But, on the other hand, not only does Stevenson—who begins, like Scott, to paint from the outside inwards—let the light penetrate far further, in fact illumine his characters, as with Röntgen rays, but his characters are also of a rarer, in a sense, higher order. In some there is something of the *Uebermensch*[1] which gives them a malign sublimity and makes real tragedy possible.

Both Scott and Stevenson are great when it comes to fighting, the one by land the other by sea, the one in open battle and chivalrous combat, from the tourna-

[1] We have unfortunately in English no exact equivalent for the German word *Uebermensch*. Literally translated, it means over-man, and signifies hero or demigod or superhuman human being, to use an oxymoron. It is an expression frequently used in German, generally of some man of transcendent genius, as a Napoleon or a Goethe, especially of those who in matters of conduct have claimed, or had it claimed for them, that they are a law unto themselves—characters, in short, whose greatness is held to exempt them from the ordinary canons of conduct.

ment in "Ivanhoe" to the combat between Roderick Dhu and Fitz-James, and in battle, from Bannockburn to Bothwell Brig; the other in mutiny and the guerilla warfare, as in "Treasure Island," in strange and savage life, and grisly death-encounters, as the massacre of a whole crew in "The Wrecker," the vitriol-throwing in "Ebb-Tide," and the horrible duel in the dark with two halves of a pair of scissors in "St. Ives." But of all these the most famous and popular is the defence of the Round House in "Kidnapped."

Alan Breck, a Highland Jacobite, an expert swordsman, and David Balfour, the young hero of the book, defend the Round House (a sort of captain's deck-cabin), where the ammunition happens to be stored, against the whole crew of the ship on which David has been kidnapped. They have already repulsed an attack when it is more fiercely and seriously renewed.

"Then came a single call on the sea-pipe, and that was the signal. A knot of them made a rush of it, cutlass in hand, against the door, and at the same moment the glass of the skylight was dashed into a thousand pieces, and a man leaped through and landed on the floor. Before he got his feet, I had clapped a pistol to his back and might have shot him, too; only at the touch of him (and him alive) my whole flesh misgave, and I could no more pull the trigger than I could have flown.

"He had dropped his cutlass as he jumped, and when he felt the pistol, whipped straight round, and laid hold of me, roaring out an oath, and at that, either my courage came again or I grew so much afraid as came to the same thing, for I gave a shriek and shot him in the midst of the body. He gave

the most horrible ugly groan and fell to the floor. The foot of the second fellow, whose legs were dangling through the skylight, struck me at the same time upon the head; and at that I snatched another pistol and shot this one through the thigh, so that he slipped through and tumbled in a lump on his companion's body. There was no talk of missing, any more than there was time to aim; I clapped the muzzle to the very place and fired.

"I might have stood and stared at them for long, but I heard Alan shout as if for help, and that brought me to my senses.

"He had kept the door so long, but one of the seamen, while he was engaged with the others, had run in under his guard and caught him about the body. Alan was dirking him with the left hand, but the fellow clung like a leech. Another had broken in and had his cutlass raised. The door was thronged with their faces. I thought we were lost, and catching up my cutlass, fell on them in flank.

"But I had no time to be of help. The wrestler dropped at last, and Alan, leaping back to get his distance, ran upon the others like a bull, roaring as he went. They broke before him like water, turning and running and falling one against another in their haste. The sword in his hands flashed like quicksilver into the huddle of our fleeing enemies, and at every flash there was the scream of a man hurt. I was still thinking we were lost, when lo! they were all gone, and Alan was driving them along the deck as a sheep-dog chases sheep.

. . . . . .

"The round-house was like a shambles; there were two dead inside; another lay in his death-agony across the threshold; and there were Alan and I victorious and unhurt.

"He came to me with open arms. 'Come to my arms!' he cried, and embraced and kissed me hard on both cheeks. 'David,' he said, 'I love you like a brother. And oh, man,' he cried, in a kind of ecstasy, 'am I no' a bonnie fighter?'"

Alan Breck is one of Stevenson's happiest creations. Brave as a lion in fight, yet timorous at the prospect of a watery grave, true as steel to his chieftain and his cause, warm-hearted and devoted to his friend, he is puffed up by inordinate vanity and struts in the hour of success with the airs of a victorious fighting-cock. His vanity and Highland pride make him easy to offend, but, except in the case of his hereditary foemen, he is generously placable. He has marvellous *aplomb*, especially in his ways with women, old or young, a quality in which his friend David is sadly lacking.

The pair of friends are skilfully contrasted, each affording an admirable foil to the other, and, as is usual with Stevenson, he handles these two mutually reacting characters with subtle psychological truth and a quiet play of humour which keeps the reader cheerful and happy through the otherwise over-elaborate description of their flight together.

The *plot* of the story is slight and of no great novelty. A wicked uncle, Ebenezer Balfour, a weirdly, skilfully-drawn figure, who has his nephew kidnapped to get rid of him, and the adventures of the lad Balfour on the brig *Covenant*, and then on the island

of Erraid, and the flight of David and Alan, who, though innocent, are implicated in the Appin murder and the final return of David, when he comes into his own, occupy the whole book. It cannot be said to be so absorbing as "Treasure Island," but still it shows Stevenson's power of holding our interest apart from the exciting expedients more rife in the earlier book. We see life in "Kidnapped" in a more normal and healthy light than in the other, but it lacks the strong central interest afforded by the character of Silver.

But, even apart from the very leading characters, we have some very striking portraiture in "Kidnapped." Hoseason is a fine, solid, grim villain, with an unmistakably distinct, almost magnetic personality, and with a curious hard touch of the Puritan about him. Poor Ransome, the half-witted cabin-boy, is a memorable and pathetic picture, and the two Catechists, and Cluny in his hiding, the lawyer Rankeillor and Robin Oig have each their picturesque and distinctive characters, so that, while the events are less exciting, the minor characters are more living than in "Treasure Island."

From the historical point of view, while no events of signal importance are brought on the stage, the condition of the Highlands shortly after the rebellion is vividly painted, and both the noble traits and the characteristic foibles of Highland character are sharply and faithfully depicted. Stevenson, indeed, is more impartial, less affected by Jacobite sentiment, than Scott, and, like David Balfour, who is very much of R. L. Stevenson, at bottom a sound Whig.

It may be said of "Kidnapped" that there is abso-

lutely no love-interest, and we have been so starved of the feminine element that the good-natured lass at Limekilns, who so pluckily saves the pair of fugitives, quite takes our eye, so that we feel it quite ungallant of Stevenson when he, so to speak, slams the door of his tale in her face the moment his Dioscuri have no further use for her. To some extent friendship takes the place of love in the story, and the humours of the two friends towards each other are the only substitute we have for the lovers' differences and misunderstandings of the more ordinary plot. Later on we shall meet David in love, and a pretty bad job he would have made of it, left to himself.

We now come to a volume which in reality carries us back somewhat in our author's career, seeing that the short stories it contains were mostly written and published in magazine form, before the appearance of "Kidnapped." I mean "The Merry Men, and other Stories and Fables," which contains some of Stevenson's very best things, and that in all his various manners.

"Will o' the Mill," for example, is perhaps the most perfect philosophic idyll in prose, certainly in the English tongue, if not in any language.

"Markheim" is a moral apologue as impressive as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, and ending on a much more gracious, more noble note.

"Thrawn Janet," as an incarnation of a weird popular superstition, related appropriately in the vernacular, is unsurpassed.

In "Olalla" we have, what is so rare in Stevenson, a treatment of passionate love and the creation of a really living and breathing woman. Olalla and her mad

mother, and even the ancestress in the portrait, seem vital realities to us; Olalla is one of the noblest types of a tragic heroine, and is nevertheless painted with a voluptuous fulness that puts the reader's blood into a tumult. In spite of the tragic inevitableness of the situation, we are so infected with a passion for her beauty of soul and body, that we think very little of the lover who can leave her, even at her own entreaty. In the true tragic fitness of things they ought to die together. Yet the story is very noble, and the concluding lines express, as Stevenson's writings rarely do, his relation to Christianity.

"I looked at the face of the crucifix, and though I was no friend to images, and despise that imitative and grimacing art of which it was a rude example, some sense of what the thing implied was carried home to my intelligence. The face looked down upon me with a painful and deadly contraction; but the rays of a glory encircled it, and it reminded me that the sacrifice was voluntary. It stood there, crowning the rock, as it still stands on so many highway sides, vainly preaching to passers-by, an emblem of sad and noble truths—that pleasure is not an end, but an accident; that pain is the choice of the magnanimous; that it is best to suffer all things and do well. I turned and went down the mountain in silence; and when I looked back for the last time before the wood closed about my path, I saw Olalla still leaning on the crucifix."

In delightful contrast to this piece of noble tragedy comes the genial philosophic comedy, "The Treasure of Franchard." A retired French physician, Dr. Desprez, a philosopher to his own thinking, a lover of good living, and especially of his glass of wine,

garrulous, kindly, vain, luxurious, adopts a poor lad, Jean Marie, who had been trained as a mountebank and educated as a thief. He comes, nominally as stable-boy, really as adopted son, into the childless household of the Doctor and his sleek, amiable, sensuous, affectionate wife Anastasie, who, like the Doctor, soon takes the strange but pretty child to her heart. The Doctor had had a rather wild past in Paris, and his wife was delighted when money losses compelled him to retire to the delightful village of Gretz in the forest of Fontainebleau, where he lives in philosophic moderation and calm, the life of a model husband. In one of his many confidences to the boy, whose education he undertakes, the Doctor declares that if he ever had money enough to return to Paris, he would soon be miserable and ruined, and that everything must be done to prevent this, even to the wrecking of the train. One day, in a botanical ramble with the boy, he comes on the Treasure of Franchard, a collection of solid gold plate which had been hidden many years under ground. The Doctor is elated, forgets his good resolutions, and carries away even his wife in his enthusiasm. They are to go to Paris, she is to sparkle with diamonds and shine in Society; he is to become famous, and his society is to be sought after. Next morning the treasure has disappeared; the cupboard is broken open and there is no trace of the thief, but a few scratches by nailed boots on the green paint of the gate. The Doctor suspects some loafing artists, but no one of his household. He telegraphs for his brother-in-law, who by a few trenchant questions convinces himself that Jean Marie is the thief. The boy retreats in a passion of tears, and is only brought back by

Madame Desprez, under promise that no word more shall be addressed him on the subject. Still the worthy pair will not entertain the idea of his guilt; a few days after their house is burned and they lose all their fortune. At this juncture, as the reader expects, Jean Marie reappears with the treasure, having stolen it to save his beloved master from the ruin he himself had predicted. The good people take the child to their hearts; they are to rebuild the house and remain content as before with the simple healthful pleasures of life in Gretz. All the characters are here admirably living. The Doctor is a piece of humour worthy to be paired off with Monsieur Leon Bertilini in "Providence and the Guitar," and Anastasie is as sleek, and comely, and womanly, and real for us, as though we had sat by her at the Doctor's table. And we love Jean Marie, though there is just a touch of the "uncanny" about him, as there is in Goethe's Mignon and Hawthorne's Pearl.

There remains to be mentioned the title-story, "The Merry Men," which attracts me less than any of the others, containing neither a strong enough nor a genial enough character to raise human interest in the highest degree, but in its descriptions of the terrible aspects of the sea, equal to anything in Hugo for power, while greatly excelling him in fidelity to fact and truth to nature.

There is in many of Stevenson's stories a characteristic trait which must be to many readers, and especially to those of the so-called weaker sex, annoying—that, I mean. of balking them of what seems a natural and proper *dénouement*, especially in a love affair. A friend of mine, also an author and writer

of fiction, declares that his lady-readers are, to a woman, wishful for the success of a love affair in a novel, whether it be innocent or guilty. That their interest should be excited and then nothing come of it, constitutes, it would seem, a grave charge against an author. Now in this respect Stevenson is an inveterate offender. In "Will o' the Mill," for instance, Miss Marjory and Will love and are beloved and, just when we are expecting the marriage-bells to ring out, this incontinently philosophic William decides it is not worth while to get married. So, a little later, Marjory marries another and shortly dies, and, in a sense, the whole idyll is nugatory. To a man such conduct seems that of a mystical, hypersensitive idealist, or, as many would coarsely put it, a fool; to many women, who are in some ways less idealist than men, it would appear that of a lunatic or a brute. Poor Will was indeed befooled by his wisdom and, so to speak, lost the substance in the attempt to keep the image untarnished by too intimate and daily usage. Like many of Stevenson's other stories, this is fully as much fable as story, and may be taken either as example or as warning. It is often difficult to know which side the author takes, and which his genial and sympathetic satire is bent on reproving. He draws Will with the greatest tenderness, and seems to love him and to wish the reader to love him as one does. But when the subject was discussed at Vailima, his Samoan home, he vigorously repudiated Will's negative philosophy. His favourite paradox seems to be that, while nothing is worth doing for the object to be gained, yet, for the doing itself, it is well worth it. He would play the

game of life, not for the stakes and prizes it holds out, but purely for the sake of the game.

In his highly characteristic "Song of the Road," in the volume of poems entitled "Underwoods," he sings—

> "There's nothing under heaven so blue,
> That's fairly worth the travelling to.
> On every hand the road begins,
> And people walk with zeal therein;
> But wheresoe'er the highways tend
> Be sure there's nothing at the end.
> Then follow you, wherever hie
> The travelling mountains of the sky.
> Or let the streams in civil mode
> Direct your choice upon a road;
> For one and all or high or low
> Will lead you where you wish to go;
> And one and all go night and day
> Over the hills and far away."

In another poem he clearly praises action—

> "For still the Lord is Lord of might;
> In deeds, in deeds, He takes delight:
>
> . . . . .
>
> Those He approves that ply the trade,
> That rock the child, that wed the maid,
> That with weak virtues, weaker hands,
> Sow gladness on the peopled lands,
> And still with laughter, song, and shout,
> Spin the great wheel of earth about."

So he casts his vote finally for action, as against paralysing reflection about action, for the simple activities of life, as against a philosophic abstention. His thought moves, however, in what is strictly an eccentric orbit, of which the one focus is this "all-is-

vanity" philosophy and the other a love of normal human activities.

The verses in "Underwoods" are the verses of the philosophic *littérateur* rather than those of the born poet, and consist of occasional poems, gnomic pieces, and poems in the Scottish dialect, mainly that of the Lothians. In verse Stevenson has not attained the distinction of his prose, and his poems are commemorative in style of other poets, here of Emerson, here of Landor, here of Milton or Arnold, and in the Scotch pieces, inevitably, of Burns. But it must be said he does these masters no discredit: they might gladly themselves have owned his handiwork. "A Lowden Sabbath Morn," for example, might well form a worthy pendant, if not companion-piece, to "A Cottar's Saturday Night."

We have now touched, I think, practically on every form of Stevenson's work, so that in future we can proceed more rapidly and with a more comparative style of treatment—that is to say, we shall indicate the character of the book not integrally, but differentially as compared with its predecessors.

CHAPTER XI

ESSAYS AND ROMANCES

THE next book of Stevenson's is one over which we would willingly linger, and whose charming, heart-warming pages are in my copy even rifer with markings of the applauding pencil than any other. Perhaps the book goes to my heart so closely because some of its "Memories and Portraits" are often the same as I myself have known. His "College Memories," for instance, embraced almost the same *personnel* of professors, class assistants, and so forth, as my own. I cannot, indeed, resist quoting his pen-and-ink portrait of the dear old Professor of Mathematics of our day in Edinburgh. He was already an old man; I daresay he had his lectures by heart, and the class occasionally stamped time to the rhythm of familiar sentences. But as Stevenson says:—

"No man's education is complete or truly liberal who knew not Kelland. There were unutterable lessons in the mere sight of that frail old clerical gentleman, lively as a boy, kind like a fairy godfather, and keeping perfect order in his class[1] by the spell of that very kindness—for all his silver hair and worn face, he was not truly old, and he

[1] No child's-play in a class of between one and two hundred unlicked Scottish students.

had too much of the unrest and petulant fire of youth, and too much invincible innocence of mind, to play the veteran well. The time to measure him best, to taste (in the old phrase) his gracious nature, was when he received his class at home. What a pretty simplicity would he then show, trying to amuse us, like children, with toys; and what an engaging nervousness of manner as fearing that his efforts might not succeed!—A theorist has held the view that there is no feature in man so tell-tale as his spectacles; that the mouth may be compressed and the brow smoothed artificially, but the sheen of the barnacles is diagnostic. And truly it must have been thus with Kelland; for, as I still fancy I behold him frisking actively about the platform, pointer in hand, that which I seem to see most clearly is the way his glasses glittered with affection. I never knew but one man who had (if you will permit the phrase) so kind a spectacle."

My own education has at least the one touch of completeness of having known, and, I may almost say, loved this dear old gentleman, and I can soberly say that no photograph, however perfect, no portrait, however masterly, could possibly recall the whole being of this kindly creature, who has been probably twenty years in his grave, than do these few lines of Stevenson's—I can see the small, bent, but still springy form, the small head rounded and firm as an apple, the glint of the "kind spectacles" and the cheerful "marbly"[1] voice, the only important trait Stevenson has missed.

[1] *Marbly* must be taken as onomatopoetic and perhaps thought of in connection with *warble* to get the exact effect of the epithet.

In the whole of this volume we find a certain mellowness, a certain ripeness: mellowness as of an old family portrait; ripeness, of the master whose medium, like some perfectly-trained horse that obeys the lightest touch of the rein, the least pressure of the heel, seems become a part of himself. The art, more completely than in the earlier essays, conceals art. The portraits, drawn from the life, are not warped or distorted by the idiosyncrasies of Stevenson's philosophy, and so are solidly, unaffectedly human, as were the originals. Nothing is, indeed, so dangerous to the artist, the creator, as holding theories either of life or art.

In this very volume we find Stevenson in "A Gossip on Romance," an essay I know he ranked among his best, theorising on Romance, and what do we really discover? The causes of his success? No, the reason of his failures. The particular passage I refer to is this, which contains much truth excellently expressed, and nevertheless points out clearly, more clearly than we could have pointed out for ourselves, a weak point in Stevenson's narrative art, or, one should rather say, in his creative art. The passage is as follows:—

"To come at all at the nature of this quality of romance, we must bear in mind the peculiarity of our attitude to any art. No art produces illusion; in the theatre we never forget we are in the theatre; and while we read a story, we sit wavering between two minds, now merely clapping our hands at the merit of the performance, now condescending to take an active part in fancy with the characters. This last is the triumph of romantic story-telling; when the reader

consciously plays at being the hero, the scene is a good scene. Now in character studies the pleasure we take is critical; we watch, we approve, we smile at incongruities, we are moved to sudden heats of sympathy with courage, suffering, or virtue. But the characters are still themselves, they are not us; the more clearly they are depicted, the more widely do they stand away from us, the more imperiously do they thrust us back into our place as spectator. I cannot identify myself with Rawdon Crawley or Eugene de Rastignac, for I have scarce a hope or fear in common with them. It is not character, but incident, that woos us out of our reserve; something happens as we desire it to have happened to ourselves; some situation, that we have long dallied with in fancy, is realised in the story with enticing and appropriate details. Then we forget the characters; then we push the hero aside; then we plunge into the tale in our own person, and bathe in fresh experience; and then, and then only we say we have been reading a romance."

Now there are just exactly to my mind two ways of it; either that this is not a correct definition of romance, or romance is thereby stamped as an inferior form of creative art to the highest. For what is it that distinguishes and renders immortal the greatest works of all time: "The Iliad" and "Odyssey," Shakespeare's Plays, Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales," "Faust," "Paradise Lost," "Vanity Fair," "Pilgrim's Progress," all Scott's best novels, Dickens, Hugo, Cervantes, all or nearly all the really imperishable works? It is not that they have heroes and situations with which the reader plunges himself

head over ears, but that they afford us *objective* creations, which become part of our mental furniture. We are convinced that if we had walked into Troy we should know Hector and Paris, Priam and Hecuba, Zeus and Pallas Athene. They are old friends, beside whom our own personal intimates seem almost interlopers. The hero of a story—even a Ulysses—is often a mere thread to hang the story on. The other characters are the pearls that take our eye. And, further, the characters that most impress us are precisely those with whom we are *least inclined* to identify ourselves. Lady Macbeth, Iago, Shylock, Falstaff, Mephistopheles, Sancho Panza, Mr. Micawber, Becky Sharp, Richard the Third, are either morally or in point of dignity contemptible, yet they are the great characters for the actor and the play-goer. And this applies just as much to Stevenson's own works. What makes "Treasure Island" a great book? Is it Jim Hawkins? Is it even the Doctor, the Captain, or the Squire? Certainly not. It is Long John Silver, one of the vilest scoundrels under the wide heaven of fiction. We do not throw ourselves into John Silver, but we watch him with a horrible, and yet pleasurable, fascination. Even in "Kidnapped," it is not David Balfour, honest lad, that rivets our attention and fills the stage of our imagination. No; the villainous miserly uncle even, the grim buccaneer Hoseason, the appalling blind Catechist, the genial pedant lawyer Rankeillor, and, best of all, the vengeful, bloodthirsty, vain, but loyal and ever picturesque Alan Breck. No doubt for a work of art to be interesting in the highest degree there must be a character with which we can more or less

identify ourselves, but that is nearly always the very personality that is least of all objective for us, just as our own personality is in real life the least objective.

The case of "The Black Arrow," Stevenson's next romance, is a curious one, and one over which there is perhaps an even sharper difference among Stevenson's readers and admirers than on any other point. A few sentences from the dedication to his wife will best set forth the situation.

"I have watched with interest, with pain, and at length with amusement, your unavailing attempts to peruse 'The Black Arrow,' and I think I should lack humour indeed, if I let the occasion slip and did not place your name on the fly-leaf of the only book of mine that you have never read—and never will read." With still further and almost Quixotic candour he proceeds to say:—

"The tale was written years ago for a particular audience" (for a boy's paper), "and, I may say in rivalry with a particular author, Mr. Alfred R. Phillips—but in the eyes of readers who thought less than nothing of 'Treasure Island,' 'The Black Arrow' was supposed to mark a clear advance. Those who read volumes and those who read story-papers belong to two different worlds. The verdict on 'Treasure Island' was reversed in the other court; I wonder if it will be the same with its successor?"

I had myself, curiously enough, exactly the same relations to the book as Mrs. Stevenson. I *could not* read it, and it was only from a sense of duty,

when preparing for this article, that I at length succeeded in doing so. The opening of the book always repelled me; I believe from a lack of the *distinction* that usually, even in the opening sentences of his books, declares Stevenson's individuality and his clear exaltation over the herd of book-makers for juvenile consumption. The opening chapters seemed hopelessly commonplace in comparison with one's expectation. Dick was of the commonest type of boy's hero, Matchem one of Stevenson's most colourless women, and even the relations of the two seemed a poorer and cheaper and commoner version of the more subtile character-play of David and Alan. Then Stevenson is not really at home in the period, his archaisms of speech and diction are almost as rudimentary and conventional as Sir Walter's. We had been accustomed to the perfect temporal fitness of Stevenson's Georgian speech in which he was as much at ease as was Thackeray in the dialect of Queen Anne. So that the attempt to render the Middle English of Henry the Sixth seems by comparison the effort of a schoolboy. Then the early incidents are disheartening, the adventures strain our credulity, the *deus-ex-machina* use of the black arrow on all occasions irritates us, and it is not till we meet the young Duke of Gloucester, afterwards Richard the Third, that the story reaches the true Stevensonian levels. This daring attempt to touch a Shakespearian character in which one might readily expect failure is the making of the book, which nevertheless must take at the best a secondary place, being a success as a boy's story, but not interesting the adult mind as even "Treasure Island" does and will continue to do.

"The Wrong Box," being the production of Mr. Osbourne, merely touched up by Stevenson, even if the indecent merriment it contains over the misadventures of a box containing a dead body—an idea quite sufficiently elaborated already in the "New Arabian Nights"—could be a legitimate source of pleasure, need not detain us.

Very different is it with the succeeding romance, "The Master of Ballantrae." The tragedy of fraternal hatred and rivalry has been frequently the subject of literary art, repulsive as the theme is, but never, I say deliberately, has it assumed a more terrible and almost sublime intensity and impressiveness than in Stevenson's gloomy, almost revolting, romance.

The elder brother, the original "Master of Ballantrae," eldest son and heir of Lord Durrisdeer, is one of Stevenson's "villains," a study in pure undiluted evil, by the side of which Long John Silver, blood-stained ruffian as he was, appears harmless and innocent. Silver is a common man, the Master is a gentleman, and in that very character (as we call the devil, the *old gentleman*) he rises to refinements of villainy, which make Long John appear a mere journeyman in wickedness. Silver is a bad man, a criminal, a murderer; James, Master of Ballantrae, is a devil. The ship's cook spills blood like water for lust of gold, but he does not enjoy evil *for its own sake*, and he has some shred of honour, and is capable of something like affection, but the Master of Ballantrae has no redeeming point in his character. Yet his personal graces, his fine airs, his artistic and finished hypocrisies, his unflinching fidelity

to evil, the magnetism of his personality, fascinate the reader throughout, as they fascinate and draw to ruin his victims. Such a perfection, such an ideal of evil, is probably beyond nature and fact, but as an incarnation of wickedness it out-tops, I think, all previous achievements of the kind. Beside it Mephistopheles seems no worse than an unpleasant cynic, Milton's Satan a haughty and malignant rebel, with some title to our respect. Iago and Richard the Third perhaps are the nearest approximations, but the one is embittered by jealousy, the other by his deformity, and is corrupted by a very intelligible ambition. With the Master there seems no excuse but that of a radically evil-disposed nature, but a nature with qualities to have made a great and good man of him, but for "the malady of not wanting." This wholly terrible and unrelieved story of fraternal hate is the skilfully and pitilessly depicted struggle between ineffectual virtue and effectual wickedness. And the moral tragedy lies in this, that the good brother is gradually dragged downwards in the struggle, till he ends by being almost as wicked, and far more despicable, than the other. It is a black and terrifying spectacle, and we naturally revolt against it, as we do against the hopeless and irrevocable degradation of Dr. Jekyll. We even ask ourselves, when a man holds so black a view of life, should he give it forth? Above all should he spend the very finest powers of his genius in driving home so appalling a conclusion? For it is not the splendid portrait of the strong bad man we resent; it is the degradation of the good brother, who was not so much really weak, as only not quite

strong enough to resist the frightful contamination of evil.

The Master of Ballantrae shows how deeply and blackly runs the vein of pessimism in Stevenson's philosophy; and we ask naturally for reasons, for causes. Two present themselves at once, and are probably the principal factors; the one personal and physical, the other springing from his nationality and his upbringing. The first is physical weakness and disease, which, while permitting of periods of comparative strength and buoyancy, brought with it passages of the deepest languor and depression. The second I would call Calvinism in the blood, hereditary or inoculated. (The previous question whether the acceptance of Calvinism in Scotland does not reflect on the climate and the state of the national liver, it would carry us too far afield to answer or attempt to answer.) In the blood of both his parents there must have lingered Calvinistic bacilli or molecules, and, as if that were not enough, he was plentifully inoculated by his Calvinistic nurse and a study of the "Shorter Catechism," so called. No doubt Stevenson thought he threw off Calvinism, but the Philosophy of the Master of Ballantrae has all the gloom of Calvinism without its high lights in which we see the Elect sitting in glory. We have, as strongly as ever, Human Depravity with a non-theological, but none the less real and terrible, Election and Reprobation of the wicked. For two souls in the romance are indubitably ruined, and of the rest neither the worthy but humdrum Mackellar, nor the suffering Mrs. Henry (latterly Lady Durrisdeer), can be said to represent "the spirits of the just made perfect." Hell indeed

yawns beneath us, but where is the heaven over our heads?

The book is, indeed, a strong book, a great book, but it sadly wants relief. The first three-quarters of the book, especially those parts enacted at Durrisdeer itself—for Stevenson, like Scott, is all the better of having "his foot on his native heath"—are admirable, and in the execution beyond praise. I confess the piratical episode and the treasure-seeking at the end seem to me not only out of keeping with the rest, but to savour of self-repetition. It is admirably done, as this sort of thing always is by our author, but we would wish him to take himself a little more seriously than to repeat the dexterity we know him already to possess, like a modern music-hall performer driving from one stage door to another to rehearse the same or give a similar performance. Stevenson, like the performer, had doubtless to live by his exertions, and, it is conceivable, might intentionally repeat those tricks by which he knows he can draw applause. But in his case I think he never outgrew his childish fancy for the Pirate and the Highwayman, whose specious and theatrical attractions we are expected to outlive.

But, as we have said, the whole of the Durrisdeer portion of the story is admirably executed. Few scenes in literature, or in our own experience, shine so clear in our memory as the interior of the old Hall at Durrisdeer and the unhappy family group, the old lord and the two contrasted sons, James and Henry, and the kinswoman Alison, destined for the wife of the Master, yet fated to marry the brother. There is the old nobleman, so full of antique grace, doating on the wicked son

and vainly striving to dissemble his preference and to deal justly with the other, who was so forbearing, so self-sacrificing, so long-suffering, till, stung, insulted, and tortured beyond endurance, he fights with his brother to the death and, as he believes, kills him. To all readers of Stevenson the famous duel-scene, as told by Mackellar, the faithful factor on the estate, who is the chief narrator throughout, will doubtless be familiar, yet the passage is too characteristic not to be quoted.

"I took up the candles," writes Mackellar, "and went before them, steps that I would give my hand to recall; but a coward is a slave at the best, and even as I went, my teeth smote each other in my mouth. It was as he had said; there was no breath stirring; a windless stricture of frost had bound the air; and as we went forth in the shine of the candles, the blackness was a roof over our heads. Never a word was said; there was never a sound but the creaking of our steps along the frozen path. The cold of the night fell about me like a bucket of water; I shook as I went with more than terror; but my companions, bareheaded like myself and fresh from the warm hall, appeared not even conscious of the change.

"'Here is the place,' said the Master; 'set down the candles!'

"I did as he bade me, and presently the flames went up, as steady as in a chamber, in the midst of the frosted trees, and I beheld these two brothers take their places.

"'The light is something in my eyes,' said the Master.

"'I will give you every advantage,' replied Mr. Henry, shifting his ground, 'for I think you are about to die.' He spoke rather sadly than otherwise, but there was a ring in his voice.

"'Henry Durie,' said the Master, 'two words before I begin. You are a fencer, you can hold a foil, you little know what a change it is to hold a sword. And by that I know you are to fall. But see how strong is my situation! If you fall, I shift out of this country to where my money is before me. If I fall, where are you? My father, your wife—who is in love with me, as you know very well,—your child even—who prefers me to yourself—how will these avenge me! Had you thought of that, dear Henry?' He looked at his brother with a smile; then made a fencing-room salute.

"Never a word said Mr. Henry, but saluted too, and the swords rung together.

"I am no judge of the play; my head, besides, was gone with cold and fear and horror, but it seems that Mr. Henry took and kept the upper hand from the engagement, crowding in upon his foe with a contained and glowing fury. Nearer and nearer he crept upon the man till of a sudden the Master leaped back with a sobbing oath; and I believe the movement brought the light once more against his eyes. To it they went again, on the fresh ground; but now methought closer, Mr. Henry pressing more outrageously, the Master beyond doubt with shaken confidence. For it is beyond doubt he now recognised himself for lost, and had some taste of the cold agony of fear, or he had never attempted the foul stroke. I cannot say I followed it, my untrained eyes were

never quick enough to seize details, but it appears he caught his brother's blade with his left hand, a practice not permitted. Certainly Mr. Henry only saved himself by leaping on one side; as certainly the Master, lunging in the air, stumbled on his knee, and before he could move, the sword was through his body. I cried out with a stifled scream, and ran in; but the body was already fallen to the ground, where it writhed a moment, like a trodden worm, and then lay motionless.

"'Look at his left hand,' said Mr. Henry.

"'It is all bloody,' said I.

"'On the inside?' said he.

"'It is cut on the inside,' said I.

"'I thought so,' said he, and turned his back. I opened the man's clothes, the heart was quite still, it gave not a flutter.

"'God forgive us, Mr. Henry,' said I. 'He is dead.'

"'Dead?' he repeated, a little stupidly; and then in a rising tone, 'Dead, dead?' says he, and suddenly cast his bloody sword upon the ground."

Few scenes of this order in the range of fiction are more vivid and haunting than this. As we follow the one shivering and terrified witness of the life-and-death struggle, the cold of the frosty night seems to take hold on us, we see the glint of the silver candlesticks, and watch the candle-flames as they steady and straighten themselves up in the still air. We catch the sad determined ring of the one voice, and the mocking tones of the other. We tremble for the innocent and injured man, and exult in his "contained and glowing fury" when Stevenson, in a fine

stroke of surprise, makes him prove the better man; at the foul play of the Master our heart stands still, and we almost cry "Villain!" aloud; and as the sword passes through his body, we applaud the deed. We admire the Master, but we also hate him, as we never hated Silver, and we rejoice in his fall; but the moment after we shudder to find our innocent Abel with the brand of Cain upon him. Very weird is the immediate sequel to the combat. Mr. Henry now collapses under the horror of the situation. Mackellar breaks the news to Mrs. Henry and the old lord. They sally forth to the scene where the candles still burn straight in the frosty air, to find—nothing but a little blood on the ground, and traces of heavy footsteps. The body was clean gone. Was he living or dead? What a question for the survivors! Of course he is not dead, or the story would have died too, he being the essential, spinal column thereof.

The other characters are subtly, effectively, admirably drawn; the old lord, weak, temporising, blind in his affection for the bad son, and unconsciously cruel and unjust to the other, yet so unmistakably high-born and courtly, and rising at a crisis into a pathetic endurance that is well-nigh heroic; Mrs. Henry too is subtly drawn, and in spite of her culpability, her infidelity of heart to her husband, moves our pity, but Stevenson, with a kind of chivalry, does not let us look closely enough on her weakness and keeps her too much veiled in the shadows of the background. She should have come nearer the footlights, so to speak: there should have been at least one direct scene of the Master's diabolic insidious wooing of his brother's wife, in which the woman could have flashed

out into solid life. Whether Stevenson mistrusted at all his power or deemed it more effective and artistic to leave such scenes to our imagination I know not. Be that as it may, she seems to lack full vitality for us.

CHAPTER XII

THE LITTLE PEOPLE

No phenomenon in modern English literature is so marked, perhaps, as the extraordinary decline, during the last twenty or twenty-five years, in the public's interest in verse. Mr. Henley, friend and collaborateur with Stevenson in his dramas, and a man in critical circles highly esteemed as a poet, has lately, in the preface to his collected verse, confessed that he was absolutely driven from poetry to journalism by the complete indifference of the public to his verse, and its steady rejection by publisher after publisher. It is very doubtful indeed if any living English poet is subsisting by his writing of poetry. The present Laureate was also driven to journalism, and probably, in spite of the prestige attaching to his office, is little richer for all the verse he has written. Poetry, at any rate modern poetry, has fallen into a kind of contempt which it is not easy wholly to account for. Rudyard Kipling is the only poet who really moves the public, and that is probably more due to his trenchant realism and his ardent imperialism than to his real merits as a poet.

Something of this may be due to the insolent contempt for verse-writing expressed by two of the most influential prose writers of our time, Carlyle and Ruskin, both of whom, to judge by the attempts they

made, were incapable of writing verse of any merit. They seem to have made it the fashion to consider verse-writing as the occupation of a trifler incapable of serious thought, or as once expressed to me by a young lady in a more concrete form, "that no one reads poetry after they were seventeen." But the greatest proof of this distaste for verse is that, even when prose writers who seem to have captured the public betake themselves to poetry, they immediately receive the cold shoulder.

This was undoubtedly the case with Stevenson's next issue in verse form, entitled "Ballads," as he has himself told me in one of his letters, and not without a touch of perhaps justifiable bitterness. Following at the heels of so notable an achievement as "The Master of Ballantrae," this volume seems to have fallen absolutely flat. It has, however, perhaps a worse recommendation to the general reader than being in verse, namely, that it required some imaginative effort to comprehend these pictures of savage life, not conventionally drawn like Cooper's Red Indians, but painted from the life by an earnest and loving student of the "blacks and chocolates," as Stevenson called the Polynesian natives of Samoa, and the other islands which he visited in the South Seas.

"The Song of Rahero" in this volume marks the high-water level of Stevenson's power as a verse-writer. The whole of the third part describing the treacherous firing of the house of Rahero and his own solitary escape is a masterpiece. It breathes a ferocity that jars on sensitive civilised nerves, but it rises into a tremendous brutal sublimity, which seems to me quite Homeric.

Take these few lines only, descriptive of Rahero's attempt to save his son out of the universal conflagration:—

"Then, where the roof had fallen, it roared like the mouth of hell.
Thither Rahero went, stumbling on senseless folk,
And grappled a post of the house, and began to climb in the smoke:
The last alive of Vaiau; and the son borne by the sire.
The post glowed in the grain with ulcers of eating fire,
And the fire bit to the blood and mangled his hands and thighs;
And the fumes sang in his head like wine, and stung in his eyes;
And still he climbed and came to the top, the place of proof,
And thrust a hand through the flame and clambered alive on the roof.
But even as he did so, the wind, in a garment of flame and pain,
Wrapped him from head to heel, and the waistcloth parted in twain,
And the living fruit of his loins dropped in the fire below."

Then the subsequent slaying of the poor fisherman, fishing with his torch on the Reef; the silent leap into the canoe, beside the dead man's wife; the driving of the canoe out to sea in the dark, while the woman cowers awe-struck in the stern, the two unknown companions facing and regarding each other alone by the dawning light on the infinite ocean, like a primeval pair suddenly sprung up out of chaos, has a wild, weird and, if you will, brutal impressiveness to which I know no parallel in modern literature.

Stevenson's next work (in conjunction with Osbourne), "The Wrecker," contains a great deal

of good writing and interesting matter, to some extent thrown away on confused and invertebrate plot. There is a crowd of characters, and more than enough of crime and sanguinary adventure, depicted with unflagging skill. The fight in the Round House in "Kidnapped" and the most murderous passages in "Treasure Island" pale before the massacre of the one crew by the other on board the *Flying Scud*. As one reads one seems to imbrue one's own hands in blood, and the guilt of murder seems to strike us like an infection, at which we sicken, and we are haunted by a sense of blood-guiltiness.

It is a piece of masterly horror, but still horror so extreme that we are inclined to ask, on the one hand, if it does not transgress the modesty of legitimate art, and, on the other, how it squares with any decent sort of morality, and whether the excitement for the reader is not dangerously morbid? One is, indeed, inclined, sometimes tempted, to declare that Stevenson, so inoffensive, so genial, so generous, so tolerant as a man, had in his capacity of author a touch of homicidal mania. In spite of many merits the story hangs more loosely together than any of his others, and adds no very important figures to his gallery of human portraits, the rather loathsome Bellairs being the most striking.

To return to Stevenson the essayist, as we do in the volume "Across the Plains," is to breathe a purer, calmer air, and, so to speak, to rinse the smell of blood from our nostrils. Still we find even here traces of those tracts of low spirits and of the consequent pessimism of view, as in the essay "Pulvis

et Umbra." But most of the others strike a more cheerful note, and all possess elements of interest, especially to those already interested in the man himself, for they nearly all throw some fresh light on his experiences, his opinions. But the most extraordinary of all is the already mentioned "Chapter on Dreams," perhaps the most extraordinary confession ever made by a literary man.

The act of imaginative composition is, to say the least, complex and remarkable, even to those who can best analyse its factors and elements, so that the old term inspiration is not so far astray. For to some the presence of a pen, a bottle of ink, and some blank paper work like an incantation, and like Franklin's kite, draw down the lightnings. We sit down, perhaps feeling we have not two ideas to rub against each other, and the mere laying of pen to paper seems to complete a mystic circuit. I have even myself felt the sensation, which may, of course, be delusion, as though I were writing to dictation, rather than consciously composing; and in quite another sphere of thought, persons capable of performing great feats of mental calculation, seem in other respects dull, and cannot explain their methods. It is as though some brighter spirit did the work, and we merely handed in the answer. In the act of imaginative composition, there is required great concentration and a shutting out of external sensations. This is one reason why many authors, like Goethe, composed best in a simple and bare chamber, and perhaps why literary persons love to have their books and papers in what appears a hopeless confusion, as such confusion is really less distracting than serried order.

But, to set the imagination perfectly free, there is nothing like falling asleep. Like a fly-wheel relieved of its strain, imagination runs on with more than double velocity. But Stevenson was surely the first to hitch such a wild Pegasus to the car of practical authorship.[1] This liberated imagination, if we may honestly use so specious a term for that to which Stevenson gives a kind of personality, "The Little People, the Brownies," grew, not at once, but by reason of a growing discipline, to be the *unsleeping* partner in the firm of Stevenson, Brownies & Co.

"The more I think of it," writes Stevenson, "the more I am moved to press upon the world my question, who are the Little People? They are near connections of the dreamer's, beyond doubt; they share in his financial worries, and have an eye to the bank-book; they share plainly in his training; they have plainly learned like him to build the scheme of a considered story, and to arrange emotion in progressive order; only I think they have more talent; and one thing is beyond doubt, they can tell him a story, piece by piece, like a serial and keep him all the while in ignorance of where they aim." I confess I think my simile of the freed wheel helps us to some extent to a solution. In sleep the mind is freed from the strain of attending to external impressions, it is free also from the responsibilities of real life and the protests and interferences of conscience. We have thus the difference between a man in armour or fetters and a free man stripped like

[1] One does not, of course, forget Coleridge's "Kubla Khan," and a few such isolated instances, or Goethe's nocturnal scribblings in pencil.

an athlete. The man is the same, but the movement so different as hardly to be recognisable. Even the differences in taste and judgment may be accounted for when we recollect how a character may be completely changed by the slightest injury to the brain. Subtract one faculty or element from the complex we call character, and, like a chemical change, the resultant is hardly recognisable. In madness some slight mental lesion transmutes the sane, perhaps blameless, man or woman, into a compound of fiend and brute more horrible than either. We ask, is the retention of reason a feat of rope-walking over this abyss of madness, or is the rational soul within us sprung upon and overmastered by some treacherous and fiendish housemate—our Mr. Hyde?

It is likely that Stevenson's next work, "A Footnote to History," besides offending one of the Great Powers (see note, p. 5), was somewhat of a disappointment to the large public he now appealed to. I must admit that I found the work surprisingly interesting, one which no one, wishing to understand the very complicated position in Samoa, can afford to leave unread. The description of the hurricane in Apia Bay, when ironclads were tossed about like cock-boats, is a prose masterpiece among the many Stevenson has produced. If Stevenson was unjust to any of the characters or nationalities concerned, it was not, I feel sure, from a narrow anti-national prejudice, nor even from British jingoism, but rather from his passionate championship and affectionate partiality for the natives and especially for his friend Mataafa, who, to judge by his looks, was a very fine fellow.

A very charming volume is "Island Nights Entertainments," the stories in which have their scenes all laid in the South Seas, and all, except one, have a strong element of magic, a domain in storyland of which Stevenson is certainly master. Even in the exceptional story, "The Beach of Falesa," native beliefs and superstitions are rife, and are worked upon by the villain of the piece, Case, a villain distinctly inferior to some of Stevenson's other villains, being purely repulsive and never rising to the levels of Long John or the Master of Ballantrae. What charm the story has lies in the character of Uma, the native girl, whom the hero, Wiltshire, marries. Indeed it is rather on her account than on that of the able-bodied, but not-otherwise-very-interesting hero that we rejoice, when, in the inevitable life-and-death encounter between the two men, Wiltshire's knife gets home to Case's heart. But I think all will incline to reprobate as an unnecessary piece of savagery the stabbing of the dead body.

But the masterpiece of the book is the magical story of the "Bottle Imp." On an idea taken from an early nineteenth-century play, Stevenson has founded one of the most charming of fairy stories. Written chiefly with the view of pleasing a Samoan audience (for it was translated into Samoan, and is still no doubt one of the favourites in the island story-teller's stock-in-trade), it has just that ingenuous, child-like simplicity of belief and expression that makes the perfectly fitting medium for such a tale. There is no doubt a touch of the gruesome in the tale in that the possessor of the Imp, while he can have wealth to his wish, must, if he dies with it in his possession, go to

hell. Very touching is the generous struggle between Keawe and his wife Kokua to buy the bottle from each other and thus save the loved one the horrible penalty. The trouble is that it must be always sold at a loss, and finally the price gets so low that it is next to impossible to find a smaller coin and the purchaser is necessarily suspicious of the low price. The final possessor is a drunken sailor who is unappalled by the conditions, seeing that he is already convinced that he is bound for the same final destination as the possession involves.

As a mixture of reality with the weirdest superstition nothing could well be better, or better told, than the concluding story, "The Isle of Voices."

There is usually not a little danger to an author when he attempts to trade on a previous success by writing a sequel to, or even reintroducing characters from, a previous work. So one took up "Catriona" (first called "David Balfour"), the sequel to "Kidnapped," with anticipation of possible disappointment. With some at the first reading this anticipation may have been realised, though never to an acute degree. As a story it lacks the unity of "Treasure Island," "Kidnapped," or "The Master of Ballantrae." The interest is apt to rove into separate strands, and the book to split itself too much into distinct episodes, not sufficiently deeply involved with the rest of the story. Indeed the story comes perilously near breaking in two with the end of the Appin Murder Trial. Fortunately the reader has never been seriously interested in the unfortunate James Stewart, who was politically murdered and done to death for a crime

of which he was innocent in deed, if not in will; so that we are ready to forget him and turn the more willingly to follow the fortunes of David, Alan, and Catriona. So this is a point marking the ebb-tide of our interest, which turns to a spring-tide with the reunion of David and Alan, rises more rapidly with the meeting of David and Catriona, and culminates in the *dénouement*, when all our three favourites hold the stage.

Then the ingredients of the story, if less exciting than in the other romances, are more enduring and legitimate. The author for once remains free from his homicidal fits, and of the deaths, two in all I think, one is a hanging, done decently behind the scenes, and in the other James More, scoundrel as he was, dies quietly in his bed. To make up for the want of the more sensational elements of interest, we have a very pretty, if somewhat interrupted love-story, and we have, above all, a rarity with Stevenson, two really fine female characters.

Regarding the one, Miss Grant, eldest daughter of the Lord Advocate, there are no two opinions, and she is altogether one of the brightest, most vivacious and breezily fresh young ladies in fiction. To some extent, it is thought, Mrs. Strong, Stevenson's stepdaughter, sat for the portrait, and there is a good deal of the author himself, disguised in petticoats. Still there are no two ways of it: it is a great success.

Of Catriona there is more than one opinion, but my own, fresh from a re-perusal of the book, is that she is not only a charming creature, but a really fine and fresh creation in womanhood. She moves

and touches the reader—if he be a man at least—as few women in fiction do.

Perhaps it is that in the passages dealing with her companionship with David, Stevenson attains his own ideal of romance, and causes us to identify ourselves closely with the hero. A man in love is usually a blind fool, and David Balfour was an inexperienced "gomeral" (highly expressive Scotch word = raw, loutish, fool) to boot. We rage over his blindness and folly, as we do over her phenomenal innocence, and virginal whims and inconsequent Highland pride. But which of us who have ever been in love (calf-love, if you like), and who have had hearts pure and noble enough to be sensible of the infinite awe that hedges about a pure and noble woman, can quite quit ourselves of the apprehension that we might have played the "gomeral" as completely as David himself? Here, at length, Stevenson's chivalrous regard for woman, instead of embarrassing him, stands him in excellent stead, and enables him to portray with great truth and subtilty a virginal love in both sexes better, one is tempted to say, than had been hitherto done.

This book is not dominated by one overshadowing character as some of its predecessors, but the character-drawing throughout is excellent. The politic and unscrupulous, and yet kindly Lord Advocate, Prestongrange; Simon of Lovat, with the slippery craft and cruelty of a snake; that mockery of martial virtues, the treacherous and drink-hollowed James More, whose fatherhood to Catriona is the cruel element in her fate—these, and our old friend Alan Breck, are drawn with unfailing skill.

They are not bitten into our memory, perhaps, as sharply as some of Stevenson's more intensely rendered and insistently impressed characters, but they are none the less true, human, and natural.

Nor in local colouring and description does Stevenson here fall below his previous achievements. The flight of Alan and David through East Lothian, over country I know well-nigh as well as Stevenson, is, I can vouch for it, a piece of faithful, quiet, and effective work. So also the landing at Helvoetsluys, the walk on the quays of Rotterdam, and, best of all, the final description of the desolate and lonely dunes about Dunkirk, are masterpieces in their way, painted in a low fidelity of tone, quite as convincing as the most startling *tour de force*. On the whole, I would maintain that "Catriona" is the soberest, soundest, broadest, and healthiest romance Stevenson had so far written, and I believe it is one that will grow in public favour and esteem, and will wear better as a piece of literature than some of its more exciting precursors.

If we are refreshed as by a bathe in a clear sea, under a bright sky, by the purity and innocence of Catriona, we can compare his next book, "The Ebb-Tide" (in collaboration with "Osbourne"), to little better than a mud-bath in comparison, for we find ourselves, as it were, dredging among the scum and dregs of humanity, the "white trash" of the Pacific. Here we have Stevenson's masterly but utterly revolting incarnation of the lowest, vilest, vulgarist villainy, in the Cockney, Huish. Stevenson's other villains shock us by their cruel and wicked

conduct; but there is a kind of fallen Satanic glory about them, some shining threads of possible virtue. They might have been good, even great in goodness, but for the malady of not wanting. But Huish is a creature hatched in slime, his soul has no true humanity, it is squat and toad-like, and can only spit venom. I like the prayer-pattering Davis little better, Herrick is a wretched nonentity, and Attwood, the merciless death-dealing evangelist, is at once too exceptional and grisly a character to be either attractive or convincing. Yet on these creatures Stevenson lavishes his marvellous psychologic and pictorial powers, and these live and move in a world of rich and glowing tropical splendour, like devils who have broken into paradise. Nature sets a jewel in a toad's head. Stevenson frames his genius in as loathsome a setting. He himself felt a sort of revulsive after-sickness for the story, and calls it in one passage in his "Vailima Letters" "the ever-to-be-execrated Ebb-Tide."

CHAPTER XIII

WORK AT VAILIMA

THESE said "Vailima Letters," forming the next issued volume, consist of letters written from his island-home in Samoa to his great friend Sidney Colvin. They are of high interest, as throwing light on the character of the man and the manner of his life and work in that far Pacific island. Especially instructive are they for us as revealing his methods of work and his own opinions of his books, and as containing hints of projected works, never, alas, to be completed. But, amidst much that is bright and brave in the book, there is a strong outcrop of the melancholy underlying his disposition. Here is a characteristic passage:—

"Happy! I was only happy once; that was at Hyères; it came to an end for a variety of reasons —decline of health, change of place, increase of money, age, with his stealing steps; since then, as before then, I know not what it means. But I know pleasure still; pleasure with a thousand faces, and none perfect; a thousand tongues all broken; a thousand hands, and all of them with scratching nails. High among these I place this delight of weeding, out here alone by the garrulous water, under the silence of the high wood, broken by incongruous sounds of birds. And take my life all

through, look at it fore and back, and upside down —though I would very fain change myself—I would not change my circumstances unless it were to bring you here."

Later on, speaking of this same "delight of weeding," he says:—

"I wonder if any one had ever the same attitude to nature as I hold, and have held for so long? This business fascinates me like a tune or a passion; yet all the while I thrill with a strong distaste. The horror of the thing, objective and subjective, is always present to my mind; the horror of creeping things, a superstitious horror of the void and the powers about me, the horror of my own devastation and continual murders. The life of the plants comes through my finger tips, their struggles go to my heart like supplications. I feel myself bloodboltered; then I look back on my cleared grass, and count myself an ally in a fair quarrel, and make stout my heart."

Genius—especially imaginative, artistic, and poetic genius—rarely makes for happiness, being based very often, if not always, on a higher degree of sensitivity to that of ordinary mortals. The lump of pig-iron and the magnetic needle are under the pull of the same forces; but one lies inert, and the other thrills and trembles as in anxious, fearful obedience. Pleasure is a thrill that passes; happiness is an equilibrium, a concord of our whole nature with itself and all that affects it from without, a state eminently difficult to reach, more difficult to maintain. The artistic nature is peculiarly sensitive to pleasure as to pain; but the poise of happiness

comes to it necessarily very seldom. And, when a man keeps an artistic conscience, even the pleasures of successful production, keen as they are in moments of triumphant work, are perilous and passing, like every other intoxication, and often recoil into a cruel prostration of spirit. When the *afflatus*, as it is called, is there, one mounts upon wings triumphant as a lark; when this mysterious condition fails, the spirit falls plump into the blackest depths.

"As for my damned literature," cries Stevenson (*apropos* of the "South Sea Letters"), "God knows what a business it is, grinding along without a scrap of inspiration or a note of style."

His haunting fear was of what he called "dying at the top," the decay of his powers. It was a vain fear, as his latest work amply proved, but in view of such experiences as the above over the unfortunate "South Sea Letters," it is quite intelligible that he should have entertained it.

If "The Vailima Letters" be often sad, they are never dull, and their pathos is plentifully relieved by evident bravery of spirit and by easy humour. They form indeed one of the most faithful "human documents," as it is the fashion to express it, and whoever can read them without a deepening esteem, a growing sympathy and an increasing affection for the writer must be more akin to the iron lump than the magnetic needle. But one would fain hope that Stevenson's last four years—his Samoan life—were happier than we might gather from these letters. When a man sits down to his diary—and these letters serve very much the same purpose—the pleasures of the day, which are so often trivial and passing, appear faint

beside its labours and trials, which endure and leave a deeper impression. The more bravely a man bears himself, the more utterly he refuses to let his private sorrows burden those about him, the more apt will he be to pour out those sorrows in his diary or to his most intimate friend. No man could be loved, looked up to, well-nigh worshipped by those about him, as Stevenson was, and receive the love and admiration of his readers and disciples, without many moments of pleasure, if not of happiness.

I call the South Sea Letters unfortunate because at the time they were first published in the pages of *Black and White* and the *New York Sun*, they gave little satisfaction either to writer or to reader. But there is perhaps small reason to wonder at the disappointment they occasioned. Stevenson had, for I believe the first and only time, put his future in pawn by undertaking what we may call a literary contract. The mere journeyman in letters may afford to pledge his talents in this way, and may often redeem his pledge with credit. But the more a man rises to the artistic levels we associate with genius, the less is he able to turn out this sort of piece-work; and no one knew this better than Stevenson. He boasts in another place that he had avoided the error and temptation which so beset the modern author of following journalism, and yet we find the bird caught fast in the very net whose spreading it professed to have witnessed. We touch I think the vital point among the causes of the comparative failure of this effort when we say that the very conception of these so-called Letters was essentially journalistic instead of literary; it was not the *rôle* of the

author, but of the special correspondent he was called upon to play. One would have thought that even an acute editor would have foreseen the danger, for he was engaging an author to write on a subject in which the public were not specially interested, simply because he was Robert Louis Stevenson. Had he been going to the North Pole, Central Africa, or the wastes of Siberia, the able editor would have engaged him all the same. Now the essence of successful journalism is to produce matter which is specially interesting to the public at the moment. However brilliant these letters had been as *literature*, they were, I think, bound to fail in *journalism*, because the matter they contained was not sufficiently interesting or intelligible to the general public. The only person that the reader could be expected to fix their interest and attention upon for any time was Stevenson himself, and had he been an explorer of hitherto undiscovered countries and peoples, even a missionary with the definite aim of spreading his religion, or the head or the chronicler of a military expedition, he would have made himself a sufficiently important figure, round which to group the passing incidents and personalities. But in the character of the South Sea tourist, the recorder of apparently almost purposeless and irrelevant wanderings, even his brilliant personality does not sufficiently fill the canvas or rivet the attention. Every work of art must have some sort of symmetry, some centre to which everything else is related. The South Sea Letters (now "In the South Seas," recently published by Messrs Chatto & Windus) failed to possess or establish such a centre for the book as a whole, and

in so far cannot stand on its own feet as a work of art. But a book may be of interest and pleasurable reading without being a rounded work of art. Reading the work in its present form, while we can still clearly see the reason why it failed to interest at the time, we are still struck with the harsh injustice of Stevenson's own description of the book above quoted. It is not thickly strewn, as are many of his works, with passages that delight us at a first reading and lure us back again and again, and yet they are not far to seek. On page 19 of the present volume we have this description of the dawn breaking on the Bay of Anaho which compares not unfavourably with his best efforts of the kind.

"I have watched the morning break in many quarters of the world; it has been certainly one of the chief joys of my existence, and the dawn that I saw with most emotion shone upon the Bay of Anaho. The mountains abruptly overhang the port with every variety of surface and of inclination, lawn, and cliff, and forest. Not one of these but wore its proper tint of saffron, of sulphur, of the clove, and of the rose. The lustre was like that of satin; on the lighter hues there seemed to float an effloresence; a solemn bloom appeared on the more dark. The light itself was the ordinary light of morning, colourless and clean; and on this ground of jewels pencilled out the least detail of drawing. Meanwhile around the hamlet, under the palms, where the blue shadows lingered, the red coals of cocoa husk and the light trails of smoke betrayed the awakening business of the day; along the beach men and women, lads and lasses, were returning from the bath in bright raiment,

red and blue and green, such as we delighted to see in the coloured little pictures of our childhood; and presently the sun had cleared the eastern hill, and the glow of the day was over all."

But the best part of the book is that relating to the Gilbert Islands, and of this by far the best portion is that relating to the island of Apemana and its king. And why is this? Because at last the picture has got its effective and sufficing central figure, round which the rest revolves, in the character of Tembinok, the Napoleon or the Tamerlane of Apemana. The absolute despot and dealer of life and death to the whole of this mimic empire, Tembinok affords a not uninstructive object-lesson in politics, for the monocracy of Tembinok has succeeded a stormy and futile republic, of which neither Europe, America, nor Africa has the monopoly. So long as Tembinok holds the field himself all is well and clear, but when we are expected to follow the career of two gentlemen with such impalpable distinction of names as Tembaitake and Tembinatake, the casual European mind, fed on the husks of the Roman Empire, refuses impotently to follow the sinuous narrative. Here we come upon another stumbling-block to the casual and even to the careful reader—the difficulty, at first well-nigh impossibility, of carrying these native names in one's head even from chapter to chapter. It reminds me of the way in which the Maori names of places played jing-a-ring in my head during the first days of my visit to New Zealand; though after a time they settled down to respectability, and even came to the lips at command. But the volume is, indeed, an

improvement on the serial articles, and though its essential and primary defects must always remain, it can be read with pleasure and interest, and at times with admiration, and there lies in it a fund of exact and genial observation, interesting to all who have a reasonable curiosity about human nature in all its shades.

Nothing serves the human mind so long as a symbol, because one must suppose it can, like the apostle and in somewhat the same sense, "be all things to all men." Religious symbols, the sign of the Cross, the Communion, Baptism, Marriage are all symbolic, and it is hard to say if they represent exactly the same ideas to any two persons. This it is that makes them of universal acceptance. The definitions of theologians are the wedges that split up religion; symbols, the bands that bind them together. Next to symbols and symbolic acts for power and durability come literary symbols, the figure of speech, the metaphor, the simile and even the hyperbole, then proverbs, fables, and allegories. If the author of a proverb could only tag his name to it, he would be surer of immortality than Shakespeare, just as that of Æsop is as well assured as that of Homer.

This truth was, I doubt not, well known to Stevenson, and this, along with his creative instinct and horror of dogma, may account for his fondness for fable. Many of his shorter stories, as we have already observed, are in part fables. But in republishing Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, Stevenson's representatives, in consonance with, but probably not in consequence of, a suggestion of my own, added to the volume a number

of undoubted and professed fables. Nothing more curious, more characteristic, more original, more packed with quaint, striking, and pungent, if almost bitter, truths has come from his or perhaps from any pen. With his usual penetration in matters of literary art, Stevenson perceives that the moral is the inartistic part of the fable. The moral is committal, it is the priest turned theologian and thus making himself a target for the adversary. It is also usually superfluous. Stevenson therefore usually leaves it out or clothes it in "gnomic" verse nearly as symbolic as the fable itself. This innovation will not tend to the immediate popularity of the fables, because I am afraid many of us prefer to be told what is meant to having to find out for ourselves, especially when we can never be sure that we are right. Here is one of the pithiest, which seems to embody the retort of Youth to "Crabbed Age":—

"Be ashamed of yourself," said the Frog. "When I was a Tadpole, I had no tail."

"Just what I thought," said the Tadpole. "You never were a Tadpole."

Some of the so-called fables are rather long and elaborate for the name, and stretch into the domain of allegory or symbolic tale. But they are highly significant, always striking, and often beautiful. To this class belong "The House of Eld," "The Touchstone," "The Poor Thing," and "The Song of the Morrow." The first is a warning to the reformer and iconoclast, and sums up its moral thus:—

> "Old is the tree and the fruit good,
> Very old and thick the wood.

Woodman, is your courage stout?
Beware! the root is wrapped about
Your mother's heart, your father's bones,
And like the mandrake comes with groans."

The art of novel-writing is perhaps at once the easiest and most difficult of all varieties of literary art. Almost any school-miss could write a novel capable of interesting unsophisticated readers, and yet, when we come to the greatest novelists, we find that masterpieces are extremely rare. There is a curiously parallel case, which would at first sight seem to stand in the very antipodes to the novel, *i.e.* the sonnet. In no poetic form can mediocrity so readily pass muster; in none is it more difficult to find instances of absolute perfection. In these two cases the reasons are exactly opposite. The strict laws of the sonnet are clear to the meanest capacity, and when once fulfilled absolutely ensure a certain beauty of result; but in the novel the very laxity of its unwritten laws enables incompetency often to pass unreproved. In the same way the exacting technique of the one makes actual perfection difficult and rare; while the chartered freedom of the novelist leaves him liable to a thousand errors. A perfect novel in fact demands so many qualities, and such a just balance of these, that it can only be written in the fulness and ripeness of power, imagination, and experience. Be it noted that a success and a masterpiece are two different things. Stevenson had already many successes; but his more critical, though none the less enthusiastic, admirers still awaited his masterpiece. "Catriona," if not exactly itself a masterpiece in the strictest sense, had proved Stevenson's possession of the

qualities to produce one. He had worked up, as it were, important arrears in his treatment of his women characters. He had drawn closer to them without sacrifice of delicacy. No doubt "Ebb-Tide" dashed our hopes with its relapse into the violent and villainous. But he repented of it like a debauch, and, as with some men after a debauch, felt cleared and strengthened instead of wrecked. So, after what in one sense was his lowest plunge, Stevenson rose to his greatest height.

On the great merits of "Weir of Hermiston" there is an almost suspicious unanimity. The author himself was "frightened" by the ease with which he produced it, and the excellence of the result. His friend Colvin, an exacting, delicate, and sound critic, writes in the Epilogue to the "Vailima Letters": "The fragment which he wrote during the last month of his life gives to my mind (as it did to his own) for the first time the full measure of his powers; and if in the literature of romance there is to be found work more masterly, of more piercing human insight, or more concentrated imaginative vision and beauty, I do not know it."

When we read "Weir of Hermiston," we feel no longer that Stevenson is showing, as in some of his works, a certain side of himself and his art, and repressing the other. His other books seem like attacks to gain particular positions. "Weir of Hermiston" is a *coup de main*.

To begin with there is a feeling of space and largeness, a sense of height and depth and breadth, that is almost epic. The father of the hero, if hero the luckless Archie may be called, the elder Weir of

Hermiston, is a Titanic figure. Founded on the historic character of Lord Braxfield, the "hanging Judge," he looms upon us large, harsh, coarse, unfeeling, inevitable, immovable, changeless as the granite mountains, but with a certain stoic dignity and grandeur in his formidable personality. Harsh as the man is to the point of cruelty, gross as he is to the verge of vulgarity, there is in him something sterling and almost awe-inspiring, like some rude and even grotesque Colossus that may excite horror, but seems to soar far beyond the range of our contempt, perhaps even of our hate. Realistic, uncompromising, as the portrait is, it, like some others in Stevenson, approaches that quality so rare in romance and novel, sublimity, not the beautiful sublimity of Greek sculpture, but the rough-hewn Gothic sublimity of Michael Angelo's "Night and Morning." The other figures are apt to appear dwarfish and weak beside it, especially the younger men, his son Archie and Frank Innes, the Mephistopheles of the piece, of which Archie is the Faust. Lord Glenalmond is skilfully saved from this smallness of effect by a lofty graciousness and dignity of kindness that seem to give him height and genial largeness. Another figure that conveys this sense of great dimension, as of the fallen gods of Keats's "Hyperion," is the elder Kirstie, this deep-breasted, still golden-haired ex-goddess, talking such potent vernacular, and yet charged with a force that we feel to be elemental. Another figure of almost Titanic mould is the old Elliot, attacked when in his cups at the ford by five footpads, breaking through the five, and leaving one *hors de combat*, to drop from his dying horse at his own doorstep, and live only

to murmur to his four sons the keyword for their work of vengeance "Broken Dykes," and die cruelly mishandled. The four Black Elliots who issue at once hatless, armed only with sticks, on the grim business of revenge—perhaps because there are four of them to divide the canvas—do not loom out so large. But each is a clear, credible, solid creation. On the night of the murder, in their savage triumph over their father's prowess and their remorseless chase in search of vengeance, they take a heroic scale; but later in the story, they "fade into the common light of day," and shrink to merely human proportions.

On this lower, non-heroic plane live for us also, so far as the book is carried, the hero, the Gretchen of the piece, the younger Kirstie, and Mephistopheles-Innes. The first of these, Archie Weir, brought up by a religious, but in domestic matters an incapable, (mother admirably sketched in the opening chapters) inherits her sensitive spirit with something of his father's high sense of duty and a reticence and aloofness in society which makes him no favourite among his comrades. But when he comes to the estate of Hermiston, whither he is banished by his father, he is highly esteemed by all his retainers and dependants and worshipped by his housekeeper the elder Kirstie. Among the county families, on the other hand, his reticence and lack of the wish or art of making himself agreeable render him unpopular. To the reader he is a handsome, well-meaning, callow youth, out of which we expect the author to develop a stronger and more interesting character. There are a few points of resemblance between Archie and his creator, but if

the latter seriously meant it for self-portraiture he was uttering a gross, actionable libel upon himself.

In the younger Kirstie, Stevenson was making a very intimate study of a commonplace, by no means ideal or very refined young woman. He shows clearly his advance in knowledge of the sex, and many traits are admirably touched. Whatever she is, she is thoroughly woman, and no man masquerading in petticoats. But she shows poorly in comparison with her aunt (the elder Kirstie), and is of a shallow, vain nature without the simplicity and charm of a Hetty Sorrel. Out of a certain inadequacy in her nature and even in her passion would doubtless develop (as from the weakness of Ophelia and the colourlessness of Desdemona) part at least of the approaching tragedy. The young laird[1] of Hermiston and this girl fall in love at first sight with a passion which is on neither side of the noblest kind. Like ships drawn irresistibly by converging currents they are attracted and indeed compelled towards each other. But Archie's love has something patronising in it, the mingled pity and tenderness and desire that might mark the passion of a master for a beautiful slave, Achilles for Briseis; and Kirstie's love is largely mingled with ambition and gratified vanity, below which seethes subconsciously a potent animalism. It is this latter that helps to sweep her away when the insidious Innes, taking advantage of her pique at the more prudent Archie's seeming coldness, seduces the

[1] The Scotch "laird" must not be identified with the English "lord," though originally the same word, as it is applied to any proprietor of house and land, however small his possessions. The "young laird" is his heir.

girl. The last words Stevenson wrote were the conclusion of her interview with Archie, at which he had urged more prudence of conduct for them both.

"Archie ran to her. He took the poor child in his arms, and she nestled to his breast as to a mother's, and clasped him in arms that were strong like vices. He felt her whole body shaken by throes of distress, and had pity upon her beyond speech. Pity, and at the same time bewildered fear of this explosive engine in his arms, whose works he did not understand and yet had been tampering with. There arose from before him the curtains of boyhood, and he saw for the first time the ambiguous face of woman as she is. In vain he looked back over the interview; he saw not where he had offended. It seemed unprovoked, a wilful convulsion of brute nature."

So ends, abruptly as a sea-cliff, one of the most remarkable literary fragments in our language. How Stevenson would have steered the story through the many difficulties that obviously beset it, can never be exactly known. There was still the perilous passage of Kirstie's fall to deal with, and the terrible, already foreshadowed situation of the father's sitting in judgment on the son, charged with murder of his friend, to be brought about and carried through, and some *dénouement* to be arranged.

But one cannot leave "Weir of Hermiston" without a word of praise for the admirable atmosphere and local colour that pervade the book, especially when dealing with Hermiston. To any who know the upper reaches of the Tweed or Talla, which we may call the uplands of the Scottish Lowlands, the country of Scott and Hogg, this book brings them back with

extraordinary force and fidelity. We seem to breathe the light-heady moorland air and tread the springy heather. We feel the weight of its massive immovable sadness, the wistfulness of its winter sunshine, the brief fiery triumph of its summer heats, the savage uncontrollable wildness of its storms, and all these we find reflected in the fast-rooted folk of this high-set valley; the four Black Elliots, all so clearly distinguished and including preacher and poet, and the two Kirsties, the golden and the dark, all, except the latter and the citified brother Clem, seeming as indigenous as the heather, the birches, and the gnats.

An indefatigable worker, Stevenson found relief mostly in change of work, and so it happened that although "Weir of Hermiston" was in hand at the moment of his death he had on the stocks another novel, "St. Ives," much nearer completion. He had got dissatisfied with it, or fagged over it, and abandoned it for the time in favour of the other, so that from references in the "Vailima Letters" one is apt to anticipate something of the nature of a failure. I, for my part, was delightfully disappointed in this apprehension.

The story carries one at a gallop like John Gilpin's horse; at any rate to the point where Stevenson's own narrative (the book was skilfully led to a conclusion by Mr. Quiller Couch) ends. "Monsieur le Vicomte Anne de Keroual de Saint Ives," the hero, to whom we are introduced as a French prisoner in Edinburgh Castle, is a more lively, if more conventional hero than David Balfour, who is often some trial to our patience. No "laggard in love," the

Frenchman goes near to offend us by his self-confidence in his own powers of fascination, and his conscious use of them. His first important adventure is both serious and extraordinary, being no less than a duel in the dark, armed with one half of a small pair of scissors. He issues successful from this gruesome encounter, to which naturally full justice is done. The heroine, Flora, is a brave sweet girl, but lacks individuality. Her aunt, a loud, vulgar, but essentially sound-hearted and well-meaning woman, is on the other hand a highly successful creation.

The book is crammed with thrilling and interesting adventure, and is one of the most unflagging of Stevenson's stories. On laying down the book there are a few passages that shine out like gems among gold. There is, for example, the wonderful description of the descent of the Castle rock by the hero at the end of a rope that might easily have proved many feet too short. The scene in the bedroom of his dying uncle, when the whole household are summoned as witnesses to our hero's succession to his wealth and the disinheritance of his rival cousin Alain, the villain of the piece, is most striking and effective. But of all the good things in a book which abounds in telling and excellent scenes and situations, the best is the passing sketch of the old French colonel who has broken his parole and forfeited his honour to reach the bedside of his dying daughter, but who dies by the way. It is a passage that can well stand by anything ever penned by Sterne or Thackeray. I cannot, indeed, refrain from quoting it in part:—

"I had never," writes the hero, "any occasion to waver in my first judgment of the colonel. The old

gentleman seemed to me, and still seems in the retrospect, of the salt of the earth. I had occasion to see him in the extremes of hardship, hunger, and cold; he was dying, and he looked it; and yet I cannot remember any hasty, harsh, or impatient word to have fallen from his lips. On the contrary, he ever showed himself careful to please; and even if he rambled in his talk, rambled always gently—like a humane half-witted old hero, true to his colours to the last. I would not like to say how often he awoke suddenly from a lethargy, and told us again, as though we had never heard it, the story of how he had earned the cross, how it had been given him by the hand of the Emperor, and of the innocent—and indeed foolish—sayings of his daughter when he returned with it on his bosom. He had another anecdote which he was very apt to give by way of rebuke, when the major wearied us with dispraises of the English. This was an account of the *braves gens* with whom he had been boarding, True enough, he was a man so simple and grateful by nature, that the most common civilities were able to touch him to the heart, and would remain written on his memory; but from a thousand inconsiderable, but conclusive, indications I gathered, that this family had really loved him and loaded him with kindness. They made a fire in his bed-room, which the sons and daughters tended with their own hands; letters from France were looked for with scarce more eagerness by himself than by these alien sympathisers; when they came he would read them aloud to the assembled family, translating as he went.

"Their kindness had continued to the end. It appears they were privy to his flight, the camlet cloak

had been expressly lined for him, and he was the bearer of a letter from the daughter of the house to his own daughter in Paris. The last evening, when the time came to say good-night, it was tacitly known to all that they were to look upon his face no more. He rose pleading fatigue, and turned to the daughter, who had been his chief ally: 'You will permit me, my dear—to an old and very unhappy soldier—and may God bless you for your goodness!' The girl threw her arms about his neck and sobbed upon his bosom; the lady of the house burst into tears; '*et je vous le jure, le père se mouchait*,' quoth the colonel, twisting his moustaches with a cavalry air, and at the same time blinking the water from his eyes at the mere recollection."

And then of his death.

"Sure enough, in but a little while after, he fell into a sleep as gentle as an infant's, which insensibly changed into the sleep of death. I had my arm about his body at the time and marked nothing, unless it were that he stretched himself a little, so kindly came the end to that disastrous life. It was only at our evening halt that the Major and I discovered we were travelling alone with the poor clay. That night we stole a spade from a field—I think near Market Bosworth—and a little farther on, in a wood of young oak-trees and by the light of King's lantern, we buried the old soldier of the Empire with both prayers and tears."

Pathos is not a favourite weapon of Stevenson's, who probably scorned to play so cheaply (as can be done) on the feelings of the reader. But, like Thackeray, when he does, so to speak, condescend on pathos, it is with a master-touch and takes us fairly by the throat. When

we say that the Colonel recalls to us the death of Colonel Newcome and Sterne's Le Fèvre, while at the same time Stevenson's Colonel is very clearly distinguished from either of these, we pay him the highest compliment we can. The Muse of Pathos is the youngest of the Muses and not the greatest, and there is little in common between her and her elder, more grisly sister of Tragedy. In this respect, as in so many others, Stevenson is a *classic*, his note being tragic rather than pathetic; his humour is quiet, rarely raising laughter, merely exciting gentle inward mirth, and often, like all the higher humour, with a deep vein of irony.

CHAPTER XIV

STEVENSON AS A LETTER-WRITER

I

I THINK it is Emerson who says, somewhere, that one of the greatest goods in life is sincere conversation. It is one that might, one would think, be common as the air, but is not; for many reasons. The chief reason is that the conditions so seldom occur, or rather concur. For everything must conspire and conduce towards this communion, this sacrament of verbal intercourse. Sincere conversation is bounded on the one hand by confidence and, on the other, by decency. In this respect it is like marriage, a balanced relationship, which may be as easily ruined by an excess of familiarity as by absence of complete confidence. But confidence again does not vary directly as affection; in fact, the more we love the more difficult absolute confidence sometimes is, and it is not seldom that we confide to an utter stranger what we would not breathe to our nearest and dearest.

And what is correspondence, good correspondence, but an attempt to carry on conversation under difficulties, *i.e.* through writing? It is conversation deprived of the eloquent assistance of tone and modulation of voice, and of all the expressive accompaniments of glance, smile and gesture. It is, in a word, written

language left entirely to its own resources. Now this is a condition under which any art must either rise to its highest achievement or fail. Small wonder is it, then, that there are fewer great letter-writers than great authors, so that one may almost say that it is a greater distinction to be a great letter-writer than a great author.

There are, for example, many eminent poets—many great poets, we may almost say—in English literature, but of these perhaps only one or two, so far, can be held to be distinguished as letter-writers.

We have now before us the letters of a man already distinguished in many branches of literature, an essayist, novelist, dramatist, poet, and historian, to say the least, and we must ask ourselves the question, was he also a master of the art of letter-writing?

Now, letter-writing differs from almost every other form of literature in that it is usually addressed to a public of one. It is thus, in a sense, even more private than most conversation. In almost every other form of writing the writer speaks from a sort of rostrum or platform raised, by virtue of his office, over the heads of his audience, and the larger that audience, just as in the case of an orator, the higher flights may the writer take without risk of any fatal fall from the sublime to the ridiculous. But, in the case of a letter, there is no such large counterpoise, no such weighty ballast, and consequently, the letter-writer cannot carry the spread of canvas that the author can. The author must always, in a sense, speak down to and patronise his reader, for even the mere narrator holds an advantage over his audience, if it be merely that he, and not they, holds the key of the story and is the controller of its destiny.

But in the best letters, as in the best conversation, there is something like equality, as you cannot play the game of correspondence properly, any more than you can lawn-tennis, without some one to "serve" and "return" from the other side, and, just as our play is affected by that of our opponent, so the writer's style and matter vary, even to a greater extent, with his correspondent.

We have now three volumes of letters by Stevenson, viz. the "Vailima Letters" and the two volumes entitled "Letters to his Family and Friends." Of the former I do not propose to speak at length, because it has already been long before the public, and has probably already taken the place in their affections and esteem to which its many charms and merits entitle it. I merely refer to it in order to compare it with the more recent issue of Stevenson's letters.

Taking the "Vailima Letters" entirely by themselves, I doubt if they would, with all their brilliance and charm, warrant us in placing Stevenson in the first rank of letter-writers. For the "Vailima Letters" do not all tally with our definition of correspondence as written conversation. As literature these letters probably must rank higher than the bulk of the rest of his correspondence, but, for that very reason, they cease to be in the truest sense *letters*. For, although it was not till the correspondence had continued some time that Stevenson avowedly recognised it as a source of biographic material, I cannot but think that this idea was more or less distinctly present to the writer from the first, and that, consequently, the writer's eye, so to speak, was apt to stray from his friend Sidney Colvin to his ulterior correspondent the public. Take

for instance these few sentences from the very first letter of the collection, descriptive of his work in clearing the bush about his house :—

"A strange business it was, and infinitely solitary; away above, the sun was in the high tree-tops; the lianas noosed and sought to hang me; the saplings struggled and came up with that sob of death that one gets to know so well; great soft sappy trees fell at a lick of the cutlass, little tough switches laughed at and dared my best endeavours. Soon, toiling down in that pit of verdure, I heard blows on the far side and then laughter. I confess a chill settled on my heart."

Now this is vivid and beautiful, an admirable example of Mr. Stevenson the author's admirable style; but is it not just a little too *literary* for a private letter, even between literary men? I think Stevenson, an acute and faithful self-critic, would have been the first to acknowledge that this and kindred passages are a little out of *tone* in a private letter. And that he allowed himself so to write is, I think, sufficient proof that, if he was not consciously writing *for publication*, he had still before him the possibility that these letters might some day come before the public. I think therefore that the "Vailima Letters" are to some extent vitiated as correspondence, and that they are to be regarded rather as a brilliant autobiographical fragment, comparable not only in character, but also in quality, to Goethe's *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.

We must, therefore, turn rather to the later volumes of letters in order to ascertain Stevenson's true place and quality as a writer of letters.

These two volumes have the further advantage of affording a greater variety than the previous one.

In the first place they relate to nearly the whole of Stevenson's life instead of to one period, which, although in some ways the most singular, romantic, and interesting of all, contains also that portion of it, where alone in all his indomitable struggle he seems really for a time to forget his own gospel of gaiety and sink into something like real and abiding despondency of spirit, not indeed without its bravery, but with a note of something almost like defeat and despair. On the other hand, we have in these latter volumes a sort of running accompaniment to his whole life, and one at those points which, however discouraging to himself, are relieved for us by his well-nigh unconquerable cheerfulness and resolution. A greater variety is also secured here from the fact that these letters are written to a considerable number of persons to whom the writer stands in various relations, and whom he addresses in different styles and moods. These include many interesting people, men of letters, artists, and others of undoubted character and culture, the élite of the literary circles of his own generation. Henry James, James Payn, Henley, Colvin himself, Barrie, Hamerton, Symonds, Gosse, St. Gaudens were about as goodly a selection of such friends as one man could at that time collect around him. That he did not belong to the generation of really big men, to the generation that included Tennyson, Carlyle, the Brownings, Ruskin, and George Eliot, was not his fault any more than that he was not one of that rich aftermath of artists and poets that produced Rossetti, Swinburne, William Morris, Millais, Burne Jones, and Holman Hunt. He was himself, perhaps, as great a man of letters, or artist indeed, as Millais

said, as any of his own time. He had then the advantage of writing to such correspondents on terms of at least equality, and thus he writes in just the tone that such letters ought to have, that produced by a sense of that equality and the freedom and independence that accompany it. When he gives or takes criticism, for instance, there is no assumption on either side of superior authority, so far at least as we can judge from his side of the correspondence; and that is probably pretty conclusive. For the rest his correspondents were they of his own household, one or two friends of his youth, his old nurse, and a few lady friends. Of his relations he writes I think best to his own mother and his gifted cousin, R. A. M. Stevenson, who as nearly as possible filled the place of a brother. Curiously enough, to my mind, his least successful efforts are the letters to his old nurse "Cummie." The tone and the affection they convey are delightful, but it seems as though he could not put these quite so facilely into words as is his wont. There was here the great inequality in culture that makes communication difficult. Among his early letters are those to Mrs Sitwell, a lady who bore no small part in the encouragement and developing of Stevenson's character and powers, and to whom all his admirers owe a debt of gratitude. For, just at a time when his home relations had become strained and painful on account of religious differences, this lady became his confidant and confidential correspondent, and established one of the most healthful relations a young man can have, if only, as in this case, the attachment keeps clear of the heats of passion. *A young man* can write with a better balance of con-

fidence and decency to a married lady, capable of understanding and appreciating him intellectually, than to any one else. He feels more sure of sympathy on his *finer* side than from *a man* of his own years, and he is guarded against going the least beyond the lines of decency. Happy, indeed, is the *young man* who can sustain such a relation through years unimpaired, unsmirched, as Stevenson certainly, from the ever-respectful tone of his letters, did! A relation like this has its dangers, no doubt, in the case of passionate natures; but Stevenson was no Burns or Byron, so far as we know, and he certainly had a chivalrous regard for good women that would prevent him trespassing into that domain of over-familiarity which is apt to bring us too close to the fiery springs of passion. There is, indeed, absolutely nothing to lead us to see in this friendship anything more than the same disinterested affection as unites, often so closely, male or female friends. To a young man of the artistic and poetic temperament such a friendship is well-nigh invaluable. Women are often excellent letter-writers, and one cannot help a feeling of regret that the plan of these volumes prevents us getting even a glimpse of the lady's side of the correspondence. Whatever this may have been, it certainly elicited excellent replies from Stevenson, as this, showing both his warm affection for his parents and his growing power of perceiving and expressing effects which less sensitive, less interpretative natures were blind and deaf to, and which few even of those who feel them can adequately express in words:—

"My father has returned in better health, and I

am more delighted than I can tell you. The one trouble that I can see no way through is that his health, or my mother's, should give way. To-night, as I was walking along Princes Street, I heard the bugles sound the recall. I do not think I had ever remarked it before; there was something of unspeakable appeal in the cadence. I felt as if something yearningly cried to me out of the darkness overhead to come thither and find rest; one felt as if there must be warm hearts and bright fires waiting for one up there, where the buglers stood on the damp pavement and sounded their friendly invitation forth into the night. . . .

"You should have seen the sunshine on the hill[1] to-day; it has lost now that crystal clearness, as if the medium were spring water (you see I am stupid!); but it retains that wonderful thinness of outline that makes the delicate shape and line savour better in one's mouth, like fine wine out of a finely blown glass. The birds are all silent now but the crows. I sat a long time on the stairs that lead down to Duddingston Loch—a place as busy as a great town during frost, but now solitary and silent; and when I shut my eyes I heard nothing but the wind in the trees; and you know all that went through me, I dare say, without my saying it."

What a harmony between the two minds there must have been when he expected her to guess his thoughts, as he listened to the wind in the trees!

These passages are no doubt perhaps rather show passages, having a little of the fault pointed out in the Vailima quotation of being a thought too literary.

[1] Arthur's Seat.

But we must not press this point too far. Letter-writing, being necessarily more deliberate than conversation, has the right to a more finished, an even more highly pitched style, than can be maintained in conversation, without appearing inflated or affected. Being a continuous effort, not liable to interruption or distraction like conversation, it may attempt somewhat higher flights, may without offence be a little more literary than conversation. More in the rapid, cursive, extempore manner common to the good letter-writer and the good talker is this sketch of a Russian Prince from a letter to his mother:—

"The only new cloud on my horizon (I mean this in no menacing sense) is the Prince. I have philosophical and artistic discussions with the Prince. He is capable of talking for two hours on end, developing his theory of everything under heaven from his first position, which is that there is no straight line. Doesn't that sound like a game of my father's—I beg your pardon, you have not read it—I don't mean *my* father, I mean Tristram Shandy's. He is very clever, and it is an immense joke to hear him unrolling all the problems of life—philosophy, science, what you will—in this charming cut-and-dry, here-we-are-again kind of manner. He is better to listen to than to argue withal. When you differ from him he lifts up his voice and thunders; and you know that the thunder of an excited foreigner often miscarries. One stands aghast, marvelling how such a Colossus of a man, in such a great commotion of spirit, can open his mouth so much, and emit such a still small voice at the hinder end of it all. All this time he walks about the room, smokes cigarettes, occupies divers chairs for

divers brief spaces, and casts his huge arms to the four winds of heaven like the sails of a mill. He is a most sportive Prince."

This has really far more of the true smack of Stevenson's swift, brilliant talk, which, according to Sidney Colvin, was unequalled in his experience, and only to be appreciated by those who actually witnessed its coruscations. My own most intimate acquaintance with Stevenson was when we were little more than boys, and so far back that I can recall few details. There are those who seem to maintain that he did not in his youth give promise of his future greatness or even talent. Of greatness, perhaps not. But I remember having myself the highest admiration for him and great confidence in his future. Of his brilliant appearance in company I may here relate one instance, which occurred at my father's table in the "house at Murrayfield," immortalised in the "Misadventures of John Nicholson." We were giving a dinner-party, almost on the pleasant classic scale, and I think the guests were all men. A certain foreign gentleman had expressed a desire to meet another youth of promise who had accordingly been asked. It so happened that our foreign friend got near Stevenson at dinner and had a most interesting and, doubtless, brilliant talk with him, never doubting all the time that he was talking to the youth of promise he was bent on meeting, and who, though a man of parts, played a very secondary rôle to Stevenson on this occasion, as indeed in after life. Our Outlander was naturally astonished to find we had a second youth of promise "on tap," more brilliant than the first. Personally, having known

Stevenson from boyhood, I, from the first, formed a high opinion of his abilities, and was never in the least astonished, however much delighted, by his success. If ever Stevenson produced in those who met him an impression of dulness, I am sure it must have been due to a want of geniality in his surroundings. All who know the stifling stiffness of some zones of Edinburgh society will know how impossible it is for any glow-worm to glow or any fire-fly to flash in such an atmosphere. I thank God for myself that I was but seldom admitted to these arctic circles, and I can well imagine how they would congeal Stevenson's sensitive brain. Many literary persons are extremely disappointing companions, especially in a general company, and when they are, as it were, on view. Whether they are afraid of dropping the pearls of their conversation too freely, or whether they are saving them up for their next book, I do not know; I only know that, as a rule, the pearls do not drop with any profusion; and that often the conversation is better sustained by those members of the company who are unknown to fame. We all know on unimpeachable authority what a brilliant companion Stevenson was in his later years, and I am quite certain that those who failed to find any promise of this in his youth must either have been lacking in discernment or unfortunate in their opportunities for observation.

But we must return to our flocks.

When Stevenson is most charming and characteristic in his letters is when he writes, as one may say, in his shirt sleeves without a thought of fine writing, and merely with the view of presenting his friend

with a vivid and amusing picture of himself and his surroundings.

In a letter to Sidney Colvin, written in January 1880, he thus describes his life in San Francisco, at a time when he was at about the extreme ebb of his financial fortunes.

"Any time between eight and half-past nine in the morning, a slender gentleman in an ulster, with a volume buttoned into the breast of it, may be observed leaving No. 608 Bush (Street) and descending Powell with an active step. The gentleman is R. L. S.; the volume relates to Benjamin Franklin, on whom he meditates one of his charming essays. He descends Powell, crosses Market, and descends in Sixth on a branch of the original Pine Street Coffee-House, no less; I believe he would be capable of going to the original itself, if he could only find it. In the branch he seats himself at a table covered with waxcloth, and a pampered menial, of High-Dutch extraction, and, indeed, as yet only partially extracted, lays before him a cup of coffee, a roll, and a pat of butter, all, to quote the deity, very good. A while ago, and R. L. S. used to find the supply of butter insufficient; but he has now learned the art to exactitude, and butter and roll expire at the same moment. For this refection he pays ten cents, or fivepence sterling (£0. 0s. 5d.).

"Half-an-hour later, the inhabitants of Bush Street oberve the same slender gentleman armed, like George Washington, with his little hatchet, splitting, kindling, and breaking coal for his fire. He does this quasi-publicly on the window-sill; but this is not to be attributed to any love of notoriety, though he is

indeed vain of his prowess with the hatchet (which he persists in calling an axe), and daily surprised at the perpetuation of his fingers.

. . . . . .

"Thenceforth, for from three to four hours, he is darkly engaged with an ink-bottle. Yet he is not blacking his boots, for the only pair he possesses are innocent of lustre, and wear the natural hue of the material turned up with caked and venerable slush. The youngest child of his landlady remarks several times during the day, as this strange occupant enters or quits the house, 'Dere's de Author.' Can it be that this bright-haired innocent has found the true clue to the mystery? The being in question is at least poor enough to belong to this honourable craft."

In the same happy style, half facetious, half picturesque, he rambles on describing his day's procedure with a combination of lightness and vividness of touch that it would be difficult to equal, impossible to excel. No biographer of Stevenson would or could venture to compete with this self-description of Stevenson's of his life at this really difficult and depressed period of his career. But it is also noteworthy that he was then obviously lighter of heart than when, later on, he had an income of twenty or thirty times as much. He made in this respect exactly the same mistake as Scott, and his Subpriorsford, as he called Vailima, probably killed him as literally as Abbotsford killed Scott. Will the sons of the Muse *never* learn that "their kingdom is not of this world"? Those who would shine as a star in the firmament of poetic,

of literary fame, must lay aside every mundane ambition that so easily besets a man, and press forward to the mark of their high calling. Vailima, like Abbotsford, was a pretty feudal dream, but it broke the back of its lord and master. He carried too much weight, and he fell at the last big fence, the writing of "Weir of Hermiston," which might have been the copestone of his glory. Vailima is looted by Stevenson's old friends, his body lies lonely on the top of German Vaea, and on his heart is inscribed "Vailima."

CHAPTER XV

STEVENSON AS A LETTER-WRITER

II

ONE of the causes that wore down Stevenson, that produced that detrition of spirit, only too conspicuous in many of his later letters, was his immersion in Samoan politics. A man of letters or a philosopher touches political life at his extreme peril. Even Sir Walter Scott had an additional shadow cast on the gloomy heroism of his last years by the unpopularity his reactionary politics brought upon him. Morley and Mill are examples of the unsuitability of men of letters and thought for practical politics. And Victor Hugo and François Coppée seem to me to demonstrate how futile a figure a poet can make in the political arena. That Stevenson knew the mistake he was making is amply shown in the following quotation from a letter written in the last complete year of his life to Henry James :—

" As you are aware, I have been wading deep waters and contending with the great ones of the earth, not wholly without success. It is, you may be interested to hear, a dreary infuriating business. If you can get the fools to admit one thing, they will always save their face by denying another. If you can induce them to take a step to the right hand, they generally indemnify themselves by cutting a caper to the left.

I always held (upon no evidence whatever, from mere sentiment or intuition) that politics was the dirtiest, the most foolish, and the most random of all human employments. I always held, but now I know it."

How fiercely Stevenson's impetuous, militant spirit must have burnt itself out in this atmosphere of petty strife and irritation can well be imagined. That his share in Samoan politics produced one of his most remarkable and brilliant books, the "Footnote to History," is small consolation to us, when we consider how much greater a boon it would have been to the nation and the world had he written instead but *one chapter* of the still-to-be-written history of his native country. For Stevenson had many, if not all, the qualities that go to make, not merely a brilliant, but a sound historian. Few men were so broadly human as Stevenson, and we can only regret that the pen that hewed out for us (there is no escape from the mixed metaphor) the colossal granite figure of Weir of Hermiston, had not done the same for historic figures of greater worth and importance. One disqualification for historical work he had, namely, his bitter, his passionate prejudice against the English as a race. He cannot bear to think he has a drop of Anglo-Saxon blood, and is for ever striving, however vainly. to affiliate himself clearly to some Celtic stock. In his essay the "Foreigner at Home" he exhibits this—in a man of his breadth of view almost incomprehensible —prejudice, and it crops up not infrequently in his letters. He cannot forgive the Englishman his air of massive superiority, which he admits makes even a Scot appear inferior. That Stevenson had a foreign or Celtic strain himself, is I think past doubt, and possesses a

certainty beyond that of documentary proof. In the town of his birth he was literally "The Foreigner at Home." Much as he came to love Scotland, its climate, its religion, its social customs were obviously as foreign to him physically and mentally as those of China. His taste for Scottish scenery may almost be called an acquired taste that came painfully to him. As Keats acutely says of Burns he was by nature of the South, a child of the sun. A temperature of 60° Fahrenheit was to Stevenson what Arctic cold would be to a true Northerner. He grew strong and active in a climate that would have enervated most natives of so Spartan a climate as that of Edinburgh.

Unless we are to regard Stevenson as what the naturalists call a "sport," it is essential to assume the presence on one side or other of his family-tree of some Celtic or Latin element; if the latter, French or Italian. From what I have called the "Madonna look" of his youthful face I would say Italian for choice. And on his own testimony, he could never persuade any foreign official of his real nationality, and no one could see him in a state of animation without remarking that vivacity of manner, mobility of expression, and liveliness and flexibility of gesture, which in this country we associate with foreigners, especially Frenchmen and Italians. Some part of this might be due to his residence in France, but I think no Lowland Scot would have taken this on to such an extent, unless he had in his blood the corpuscles or *ids*, or whatever the scientific may call them, from some Celtic or Latin ancestor.

None the less is Stevenson in many ways characteristically Scotch. As he laments in one of his letters

to me, he is an inveterate moralist, and though some of his moralising may, to use his own phrase, be of the "tail-foremost" order, he is none the less for all that a born preacher. He is also naturally religious, a characteristic which seemed to grow on him as he became older, and I used to fancy that I could see in his later photographs the likeness to his father—the Scotchness of his face—gradually emerging into prominence. He had also the industry, the love of work, the stern pleasure in encountering and overcoming difficulty, characteristic of many of his countrymen. He was, in fact, on that side of his nature eminently and profoundly serious, but at the other pole of his nature he was essentially *gay*. Now, *gaiety* is the very last quality that one would name as characteristic of a Scotsman. The typical Scotsman, with all his humour, is essentially serious, and the charm, the almost supereminent charm, of Scottish humour arises from the fact that it is the humour of a *serious people*. But *gay* is a word that seldom or never fits a Scotsman. It may fit a Frenchman, an Irishman, even an Englishman, but not a Scot. Now in Stevenson there was, to say the very least, a strain of gaiety. The gallant way he encountered life and sickness and death always reminded me of the sprightly tunes played by a military band returning from their last service to a comrade. These tunes are seldom, if ever, in Scotland, native tunes. When I speak of Stevenson's "gospel of gaiety," I go perhaps a hair's-breadth too far on the other side of another definition I heard of this element in Stevenson's didactic, "The Duty of Happiness." Now, as Stevenson himself says, we are not often *happy*, we cannot, indeed, command happi-

ness. But cheerfulness, a brave and even a gay reception of the buffets of fate, is what every man of metal or woman of spirit can and ought to command. So I think "a gospel of brave gaiety" or a "gospel of cheerfulness" is more possible to obey than one of happiness.

Now this "brave gaiety" is very characteristic of Stevenson's correspondence in what we may call its palmy days, before the burden of life and work seemed really to begin to gall him, and I doubt not for a moment that this gaiety was an element in his conduct and manner up to the very day of his death.

Some dull people have accused Stevenson of being an egotist, not knowing apparently the not unobvious truth, that in order to interest people in yourself and give the charm of personality to your utterances, it is essential to be an egotist or at least to assume the rôle of one. In all the best essayists, as Goldsmith, Lamb, and De Quincey, we find a certain genial egotism that lies at the very root of their attraction for us. The offensive egotist is he who is taken up with his own interests and his own virtues. The attractive egotist is he who carries his egotism so far as to suppose his readers interested, not merely in the great and noble things he does (if any), but also in trifling personal incidents and traits, and especially in his faults and foibles. In Stevenson's own happy phrase, in a letter to me, "We esteem people for their virtues, but love them for their faults." So with an author; if he proclaims his own virtues he rapidly bores us, and we write him down a prig. But the author who skilfully betrays to us his foibles and idiosyncrasies, his weaknesses and peculiarities, gains surely on our affections, and we are prepared to forgive him, even his virtues.

It is in this way that an author becomes a real presence to us, and no moral abstraction. Both in his essays and in his works of fiction Stevenson continually suggests his own personality, and, of course, his letters do so even more strongly. We can not only picture him to ourselves, but we seem to hear the tones of his voice and see his flickering smile at his own wit or humour. There are many people, quite able in other respects, who cannot convey themselves in a letter. They are not themselves. They are playing some rôle, or wearing a mask, or hiding themselves behind arid generalities. The real self is as difficult to hit as a Boer in a trench. But Stevenson walks into the open. You may feel that you could strike him with the bullets of captious criticism, but there would be no sport in it. You say he is an egotist, and he replies in a letter to Mr. Patchett Martin:—

"Do you know, my dear sir, what I like best in your letter? The egotism for which you think necessary to apologise. I am a rogue at egotism myself; and to be plain I have rarely or never liked a man who was not. The first step to discovering the beauties of God's universe is usually a (perhaps partial) apprehension of such of them as adorn our own characters. When I see a man who does not think pretty well of himself, I always suspect him of being in the right. And besides, if he does not like himself whom he has seen, how is he ever to like one whom he never can see but in dim and artificial presentments?"[1]

[1] A curious parallel to this is Goethe's defence of what some people call vanity (*Eitelkeit*) in the fifteenth book of *Dichtung und Wahrheit*.

Stevenson had in some respects a good opinion of himself, but it had the redeeming point of being remarkably near the truth, and, indeed, if we measure it against the praise that he so generously bestowed on his compeers and rivals, it shows like humility. His *mature* judgments on his own works were eminently sane. He knew as well as any of us that the later part of "The Master of Ballantrae" did not fulfil all the promise of the earlier parts; that there was something out of key in the finale; that the company with whom he keeps us in "The Ebb-Tide" is too vile for healthy human tolerance; that in spite of all his pains and the exquisite beauty of individual passages, there is something unsound in the conception and structure of "Prince Otto." But he also knew that "'Catriona' is my high-water mark," and that "Weir of Hermiston" was to prove his greatest character, if not his greatest work.

It is difficult for a personal friend of Stevenson's to judge these letters with impartiality, the more so if he happens to be, as so many of his friends were, also keenly interested in the art of letters. For the average reader there is possibly a little too much of the technicalities of the art, a little too much personal detail about the progress of his works. But for the *littérateur*, all these things only add to the interest and fascination of the book. How bracing is the indomitable toil of the man, how encouraging to know that even he had his periods of sterility, or fallowness, and the sense of mental exhaustion! I doubt if there ever has been, or perhaps will be, from this point of view, a more delight-giving collection of letters. But, even to the mere reader of books,

it must have some interest to learn at what cost, with what pains and labour and thought, these works which, perhaps, only pass for him a few pleasant hours, were produced. It is, at least, wholesome for him to know what toil and sweat of brain and spirit go to produce conscientious literary work. Equally good for him it is also to know, as these letters vividly bring home to us, that an author is no writing-machine, but a man of like passions with ourselves, who bleeds when he is pricked, even perhaps more freely than you or I, and who, in the case of Stevenson, is full to the finger-tips of an intense, tingling, human vitality.

I shall not put formally to myself, or to the reader, who can form no adequate idea of it without reading the book for himself, the question, "Is Stevenson a great letter-writer?" For myself I feel that these volumes form one of the most thoroughly live human documents of this or any time. They form a permanent pillar or buttress of Stevenson's already solid, and to my thinking, enduring fame. And were all Stevenson's works lost but this one book, I have little doubt it would long survive as the vivid, sparkling, genial, sincere, and absorbing record of one of the brightest and bravest spirits of all time.

CHAPTER XVI

CONCLUSIONS

IT may, perhaps, be thought that I have too summarily dismissed one division of Stevenson's work, viz., that which he wrote in dramatic form and intended for stage representation; or at least that I might have said more than I did to justify the slightness of the reference I made to them. The main justification lies no doubt in the fact that, as these works seemed to me to add little or nothing of serious value to Stevenson's achievement, brevity and silence were their best epitaph. But there is another very practical reason for my not enlarging on this point, viz., that, as I had never seen any of them actually on the stage, my opinion of their merits as stage-plays was a purely theoretical one, and therefore of little account. I read them carefully, of course, with the best will in the world to be pleased and to find merit and beauty, but must admit I found little of either. They had to me as literature a bare and homeless air, as of an oil-painting out of its frame. The glamour, the brightness, the colour, that make Stevenson's other works so friendly, so warm and so inviting, seemed to have entirely evaporated. In reading his other books we every now and then hug ourselves and say, "This has the true smack, the familiar tone; it is really he that is speaking with us." Perhaps we are occasion-

ally mistaken, but not, I think, so very often. But in the plays we miss this feeling, we press the receiver close to our ears to catch the voice, and shout angrily into the transmitter, "Is that you?" Resemblance there is, of course, but only sufficient to make the difference the stronger, more irritating, and almost unaccountable. Unaccountable it can hardly be, seeing we have so close a parallel in Scott's own failure as a dramatist. The fact is, that the art of the *raconteur* is almost as distinct from that of the dramatist as the arts of painting and sculpture are from each other. The strength and beauty of Scott, in poetry especially, and of Stevenson in narrative, lies as much in the setting of the characters as in the characters themselves. So that even Scott's best work dramatises but poorly. No doubt the scenic artist may come to the assistance of the dramatist, as he does in the setting of "The Lady of the Lake," but that is never the same thing as when both are the work of one mind, and Wagner and Gilbert are alike right in throwing themselves heart and soul into the pictorial and scenic setting of their works. But, curiously enough, Stevenson has not given his scenic artist a chance, for in three of his dramas, "Macaire," "Deacon Brodie," and "Admiral Guinea," the setting is of the barest and almost sordid description. Nor is this redeemed by any special distinction in the characters, which are pretty much reproductions of his own types already well known to us, or of types already known on the stage. Perhaps the most striking character is that of Pew in "Admiral Guinea," but, whereas Pew in "Treasure Island," with his weirdly tapping stick, is a figure with a horrible fascination

and a saving touch of mystery, in "Admiral Guinea" he seems to me one of the most vulgar and revolting of stage-ruffians. But the fourth of Stevenson's plays,[1] "Beau Austin," is on quite different lines, and we find there at once the play of Stevenson's subtler psychologic powers, and see also the opportunities for the scenic artist, or at least the stage-costumier. Like the dramatised version of "Prince Otto," "Beau Austin" might be made, and no doubt was made by Mr. Tree a prettily set piece, comparable to "The Rivals" or "The School for Scandal," and the reason of its non-success is to seek elsewhere.

The audience of the novelist is more or less a selected one, and at any rate he deals with each individual separately, and does not find it necessary to carry, like the dramatist, the whole of a very varied mass of humanity with him at the same time. The stage is therefore not the place on which to work out subtle or novel ethical effects; and this is the practical weakness of Ibsen's art. The success of a piece like Pinero's "Second Mrs. Tanqueray," arises largely from the fact, that it confirms, instead of combating, the popular belief, that it is *not* possible for the "woman with a past" to re-establish herself in respectable society.

Now the sex-problem comes up in "Beau Austin" in a peculiar form, and is treated in a very unconventional way. Beau Austin, the leading man of fashion and

[1] In speaking of these plays as Stevenson's, I mean, of course, no disparagement or slight to his *collaborateur*, Mr. Henley. We have absolutely no means of knowing what pertains in such play to one or other of the joint-authors, so, for our present purpose, we must speak of them, as a matter of convenience of least, as by Stevenson.

Don Juan of his day, has, through the treachery of her maid, found means to seduce a beautiful and virtuous-minded young lady, Dorothy Musgrave, who is loved faithfully by one George Fenwick. Beau Austin leaves his victim to her unhappiness, apparently without a moment's compunction, and does not even write to her. In spite of this ill-treatment she continues to love Austin, pines under his neglect, and refuses Fenwick's repeated offers of marriage. She confesses what has occurred to Fenwick, who interviews Beau Austin (who has returned to Tunbridge Wells, the *locus* of the play) with a view of inducing him to marry Dorothy. No one can deny to this extraordinary situation and interview the quality of originality, nor maintain that Stevenson's own hand is not perceptible in it. But it is the Stevenson of Prince Otto rather than of "Treasure Island." The dialogue and its issue is managed, if not absolutely convincingly, with great spirit, ingenuity, and dexterity, and ends by Austin promising to follow Fenwick, as soon as his toilet is completed, and propose for Dorothy's hand. He keeps his word, presents himself to Dorothy, who refuses him. In the meantime Anthony, her young brother, an unlicked cub busy sowing his own wild oats in London, arrives on the scene, discovers the situation, declares his intention of fighting Beau Austin, and rushes off to find him at the most fashionable hour of the day, on the Pantilles, the main promenade of Tunbridge Wells, in the company of a royal Duke. Anthony insults Austin grossly in the presence of all, but he refuses to accept his challenge or in any way retaliate. At this juncture Dorothy, who has followed her brother, throws herself

at Austin's feet, convinced of his sincerity, and recalls her refusal. He raises her from her knees, and presents her to the royal Duke as his wife, and the curtain falls.

I confess I should have liked immensely to have seen this piece on the boards, for only then could one be quite sure, whether it could be made convincing to an audience and carry their sympathies in the way the author intended. Yet the fact that "Beau Austin," in spite of being "put on" by so eminent an actor-manager as Mr. Tree, was no great success on the stage, is a fair proof that the piece lacked some of the essentials, good or bad, of dramatic success. Now a drama, like a picture or a musical composition, must have a certain unity of key and tone. You can, indeed, mingle comedy with tragedy as an interlude or relief from the strain and stress of the serious interest of the piece. But you cannot reverse the process and mingle tragedy with comedy. Once touch the fine spun silk of the pretty fire-balloon of comedy with the tragic dagger, and it falls to earth a shrivelled nothing. And the reason that no melodrama can be great art is just that it is a compromise between tragedy and comedy, a mixture of tragedy with comedy, and not comedy with tragedy. So in drama, the middle course, proverbially the safest, is in reality the most dangerous. Now I maintain that in Beau Austin we have an element of tragedy. The betrayal of a beautiful, pure, and noble-minded woman is surely at once the basest act a man can be capable of, and a more tragic event than death itself to the woman. Richardson in "Clarissa Harlowe" is well aware of this, and is perfectly right in making his *dénouement*

tragic. Stevenson on the other hand patches up the matter into a rather lame comedy. It is even much lamer than it would have been in the case of Lovelace and Clarissa Harlowe; for Lovelace is a strong character, a man who could have been put through some crucial atonement, and come out purged and ennobled. But Beau Austin we feel is but a frip. He endures a few minutes of sharp humiliation, it is true, but to the spectator this cannot but seem a very insufficient expiation, not only of the wrong he had done one woman, but of the indefinite number of wrongs he had done others. He is at once the villain and the hero of the piece, and in the narrow limits of a brief comedy this transformation cannot be convincingly effected. Wrongly or rightly, a theatrical audience, like the spectators of a trial, demand a definite verdict and sentence, and no play can satisfy which does not reasonably meet this demand. And this arises not from any merely Christian prudery or puritanism, for it is as true for Greek tragedy and other high forms of dramatic art.

But it is high time to leave detailed criticism and to set forth in a few words a general conclusion of the whole matter.

It may seem to some that much of my criticism has been negative, and even short of friendly. But the critic, however amiable his intentions, comes with his fan in his hand to separate chaff from wheat; and there is no form of literary cant more silly than that which professes to see no fault in a whole range of an author's work, and to see equal merits in all. Homer nods, Scott works himself threadbare, and the

incomparable Shakespeare is perhaps the most unequal of writers, just because some of his works are so supereminently good. It is really only mediocrity that can maintain a dead level.

Emerson expresses the wish that authors would give us only of their best. An excellent proposal, but very much equivalent to asking a cow to give us nothing but cream. Most really great writers are impelled by an energy of production, and often driven by necessity to a constant activity which precludes the possibility of their writing always at their highest level. It is left to the professed critic in the first instance, and to that final court of appeal vaguely called the judgment of posterity in the second instance, to discriminate, to set the real masterpieces on their proper pedestals, and let the others take their subsidiary stations, or, maybe, drop altogether into obscurity. That either the critic or posterity does abstract justice to an author's intrinsic merits it would be rash to assert; but that the latter is unerring in a sense is certain, namely, that it conserves and cherishes those works which have the most abiding human interest and give the most enduring pleasure. It is one of the functions of the critic to anticipate this verdict, so as to shorten and facilitate the process of setting up the best on their proper pedestal, and letting the rest take their appropriate places. But he has also the further function of pointing out individual excellences and defects which the public might be slower than he to observe, or might even altogether miss. Unless a critic can successfully exercise both these functions he cannot be said properly to fulfil his vocation.

Now, in order to anticipate the verdict of posterity we must know first of all what we mean in this instance by posterity. And I take it that posterity is just the reading public so remote from the present that its literary judgments on the authors of to-day have become practically stereotyped. Now the reading public of this remote period will closely resemble that of to-day, except that each member of it is influenced by a certain prevalent taste or fashion peculiar to itself. But we do not as a rule allow this prevalent fashion to influence us in our judgment of accepted classics to the extent that we do in regard to contemporary writers. We do not start to revise our judgments of Homer or Horace, Sophocles or Shakespeare, Chaucer or Bunyan, Fielding or Scott, but are content with accepted opinions regarding them. So in the same way the remote generation of which we have spoken will not be engaged in recasting their judgments of Tennyson and Carlyle, Browning and George Eliot, Meredith or Stevenson. If any or all of these survive, they will be resting permanently in their appropriate niches. But this far-off generation, and all the intervening generations whose opinions all go to form the resultant opinions, will all read books for exactly the same motives as we read books to-day.

There will always be two main motives for reading literature, as literature, for the satisfaction we derive from the act of reading; and, broadly speaking, two classes of readers; one of them the readers for *pastime* in the strict sense of the word, and the other the readers for *pleasure;* or, to put it rather differently, the reader for *excitement* and the reader for *enjoyment.* For

men read very largely, when not merely seeking information or edification, for the same two reasons that they drink wine, either for the excitement it produces in their brain or the pleasure it give to the palate, or for both of these. And so, of course, in reading, the two motives and the sources of satisfaction may often mingle together.

But, in order to keep the distinction clear, let us take an extreme instance of reading for excitement. Let any of us take up a "sensation novel," be it "East Lynne" or "Called Back" or "The Mystery of a Hansom Cab" or a detective story of Gaboriau's, or a tale of terror of Poe's, and we are shortly plunged into a kind of fever of interest, a kind of intoxication which blinds us to our surroundings and hurries us swiftly, as in some fever-dream, from one excitement to another, till we reach the *dénouement* in the small hours of the morning with the candle burnt to its socket and the cold dawn reproving our debauch. Yet all the time it would be hard to say whether we have been really enjoying ourselves, any more than a man necessarily enjoys drinking or gambling, or dreaming. To be rapt away from the cares, the labours, the tediousness, it may be, of life is, no doubt, a negative kind of pleasure, like the relief of a pain removed or deadened.

But it is quite another thing when we take down a volume of a favourite author and read again some masterpiece in poetry, in narrative, or in essay. Then we enjoy it without haste, without excitement, like a *connoisseur* leisurely sipping and smacking his lips over some fine old familiar vintage. Or, even if an author

or a book be new to us, but we detect, even in the first few pages, a certain bouquet, as it were, or the high tension of a fine intellect fitly expressing itself, be it in musical verse, in luminous prose, or through the charm and force of the characters he creates for us, their reading is absolute enjoyment, as to live and breathe in splendid weather, amid magnificent scenery, is enjoyment, as listening to sweet music or looking on fair sculpture is sheer pleasure.

Now it is the tendency of the reading that makes for excitement to be ephemeral, and for that which makes for enjoyment to abide. This may not be the whole story, but it is some nine-tenths of it. And perhaps, if we could sharply divide books and readers into the two classes, it might be the ten-tenths. But they are both intermingled, as we have already said.

The question has already been asked, even among avowed admirers of Stevenson, whether his works will live and, if so, which of them. One accomplished critic has already declined to risk a prophecy, and it might be the part of prudence for me to imitate his caution and modesty. But I am not myself disinterested or dispassionate enough in this matter; I am not merely the lover and admirer of Stevenson as a man of letters. My blood warms to him as my school-chum, the companion of my youth and the life-long friend whose regard burnt true and trustful through long years and over the breadth and roar of intervening continents and oceans. I hold, so to speak, a personal stake in his fame, for I would fain believe that I have held familiar converse with one of the Immortals. So I am minded to risk all there is

to risk in the hope that I may one day be held a true prophet.

Now I venture to say emphatically and I think with little fear of contradiction that Stevenson has contributed to the body of English literature so considerable an amount of work of the first order of excellence, that, it may be said, we cannot afford to forget him for the sake of that literature itself. Take his essays alone; what brightness would pass from the literature of the last half-century, if such volumes as *Virginibus Puerisque*, "Familiar Studies of Men and Books," and "Memories and Portraits," were lost to it! There is, I believe, absolutely no contemporary writer who can hold the candle to Stevenson in this kind of essay, and we must go back to Lamb to find even a rival. Now I would be the last to deny the charm of the Essays of Elia, their slippered ease, their indoor warmth, their bouquet of book-loving culture, their good-glass-of-old-port joviality. But in Stevenson we are out in the real bustling world, we are about some business, love-making, fighting, or listening to the strange call of Pan's pipes. Where else do we find the essay rise into a kind of heroic lyric as in "The English Admirals," where for once Stevenson does some sort of justice to the one nation to whom he seems elsewhere to grudge it? Here is a man who does something more than warm his toes at a study fire. He goes to nature and men, and brings with him the smell of "caller air," the scent of the fresh earth, and the bright eye and springing pulse of one who faces frankly the rough weather of nature and life. Stevenson does not serve us with personal cultured gossip, he puts us strangely into touch with Nature,

Life and Man. There are no doubt in Lamb a number of masterly essays, that we return upon with pleasure, but in Stevenson each essay has a stronger individuality of its own, and I think a greater number remain distinguished in our memory and lure us to re-perusal than with Lamb. Now, unless this comparison is entirely beside the mark, if Stevenson be even *comparable* to Lamb, what is the inference? Lamb has an apparently assured place, a permanent niche in English literature, on the strength practically of a single volume of essays. Stevenson, in addition to all his other work, has produced three volumes of essays (I do not emphasise the number), so it would seem very strange if the one were remembered and the other forgotten.

We now pass for a moment to another group of Stevenson's works, closely allied to his essays, and yet distinct in character, I mean the books recording his own experience of travel; such as "The Inland Voyage," "Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes," "The Silverado Squatters," "Across the Plains," "The Amateur Emigrant," and the "In the South Seas." It is very difficult to find literary parallels for these, but the nearest we can find, especially to the two first named, is Sterne's "Sentimental Journey." The written travels of modern explorers in Africa and elsewhere afford hardly any parallel, because as *literature* their value is usually less than nothing. A more dreary failure, in the world of letters, than Stanley's "In Darkest Africa" human mind can hardly conceive. More nearly akin to these books of Stevenson's is such a work as Borrow's "Bible in Spain" or "Lavengro," but they have not established themselves on such a

secure basis as the "Sentimental Journey"—whatever the cause may be. I have already compared this latter work with Stevenson's early books of travel, and I still think that Stevenson's are sounder books, lacking the illicit excitements, the obvious tricks, and the overdone, and almost dishonest, sentiment of Sterne. No doubt there may still be readers to whom these faults may be attractive, but there must also be others whom they repel, and it would seem strange if "The Inland Voyage," for instance, full of humour and human interest, should have a less term of favour than so faulty a work as the "Sentimental Journey," which, in France at least, is the main support of Sterne's reputation.

So we see that, even taking two classes of Stevenson's works, we find they compare not unfavourably with the works of two eminent English classics, and I am strongly of opinion that, if Stevenson had written nothing else, he would have deserved, even if he had not obtained, a seat among the Immortals. Had he written nothing else, however, he would never have appealed to the large public he otherwise captured, and there might have been a danger of his falling out of sight and being, first neglected, and then forgotten.

Before we pass to Stevenson's more popular works, his romances and books of adventure, which have in the present day the strongest appeal of any literary forms to popular favour, let us pause a moment to consider another literary province in which Stevenson excelled, viz., the Short Story. As I have already treated this point somewhat fully, I would merely say that it is the barest justice to place Stevenson among

the masters of this difficult art, near, if not absolutely on an equality with, Poe, Bret Harte, and Kipling. So we are able to add a third shapely and strong supporting column to the shrine of his fame.

If some fairy or genius were to offer one the opportunity of appropriating any one work published during this last generation, merely with the view of being remembered a century hence, I am not sure that I would not choose "Treasure Island." There are many things, as an artist and man of letters, I would be prouder of having written, but, if it were a question of mere literary survival, I would as soon risk myself in this bark on the rapids of Time as in any other. It is not a perfect book, and yet it has a curious fascination. I have myself read it repeatedly in English and once in German translation. I know one man who has read it either eleven or thirteen times, and hopes to read it many more. Whether we can analyse it or no, there must be some peculiar magnetism about a book of adventure which grown men and even women can read again and again. I re-read lately, after a long interval, the greatest classic, except the "Odyssey," of all books of adventure, the original of a thousand imitations here and on the Continent, especially in Germany, "Robinson Crusoe." One saw clearly the merits of Defoe's achievement, the pre-Raphaelite detail of treatment, so convincing to the reader, and so useful to Swift in rendering credible and interesting his more fanciful "Gulliver's Travels." But Crusoe himself — and this is no doubt one cause of the continued acceptance this wonderful book meets with—is hopelessly commonplace, what we now call

"the man in the street." What a deaf-mute is he, for instance, regarding natural beauty! — early eighteenth century at its worst; the whole colour of the story is grey as a Platinotype photograph. In "Treasure Island" we are in a world glowing with colour, rich in romantic *chiaroscuro*. Yet the book has no pretence to originality, is professedly a *re-chauffé* of a number of its predecessors, but it has a combination of attractions which few of its predecessors had achieved. True enduring originality consists, not in doing what no one has ever done before, but in doing what many have attempted, in a better way. "Hamlet," "Faust," "Paradise Lost," and "The Fairy Queen," are the aloe-flowers crowning a series of previous efforts. So in its way is "Treasure Island." It will be a strange, dull, bloodless, if highly superior, generation that ceases to find interest and pleasure in "Treasure Island"!

In none of his other stories of this kind has Stevenson attained quite the fulness and compactness of this work. The others, being more original in one sense, attain less the kind of originality above defined, but "The Black Arrow," "The Wrecker," and even the repulsive "Ebb-Tide," make solid and excellent buttresses to our fourth column of "Treasure Island."

"Kidnapped" may be taken as the sort of bridge by which Stevenson passsed from the story of adventure to the serious historical novel. It is a curious and interesting blend of the two, and cannot be referred strictly to the canons of either. It first introduces us to Stevenson's most genial creation, Alan Breck, and it first enables us to compare Stevenson with another great master in letters, Scott. It has

been asserted that after all Alan Breck is a figure out of the gallery of Scott. I must demur to this judgment, which it seems to me can only be justified by granting Scott patent rights over the whole field of Scottish character. It would be almost as just to grant Smollett, the true discoverer of the value of the eccentric Scot as a humorous element in fiction, an injunction against Scott himself. To produce a Scotch character with no resemblance whatever to any figure in Scott's wonderful gallery, would imply a great imperfection in Scott's own range of vision and power of depiction. But Alan Breck is as distinct from Dugald Dalgetty, Rob Roy, or any other Highlander in Scott, as Mr. Balfour is distinct from Mr. Chamberlain. The latter are both Unionists, and Alan Breck and his rivals in the pages of Scott are all Highlanders, and that is all that can fairly be said. I will even venture to say that the subtle, consistent inconsistencies of Alan's character, and the delicate psychologic by-play of the quarrels of David and Alan, which we follow as interestedly as the bickering of a pair of lovers, are as much out of Scott's line and in a sense beyond him, as the broader humours of a Bailie Nicol Jarvie or a Dugald Cratur are outside the range and sphere of Stevenson. Scott fights with the broadsword, Stevenson with the rapier, and it is ill comparing their achievements. But this we may say, that no amount of study of Scott would render the reading of Stevenson's story stale or vapid to the reader.

Much the same may be said of "Catriona," in which Miss Grant, Catriona, and James More are quite sufficiently distinct from anything in Scott to rank as original creations. And the wonder indeed is, not

that we are sometimes reminded of Scott, but that, considering that scene, time, and material trench so closely on Scott's immediate province, Stevenson's characters and scenes should have attained as much individuality as they do.

"Kidnapped" and "Catriona," which from their close connection we may call the Siamese Twins of Literature, are, as I have said, in Stevenson's *daylight* manner. There seems space and air and sunshine over them, and I think they may prove to be among his novels, what "Treasure Island" is among his stories of adventure. They will be the works we will most readily return upon.

But between them, like a black and sinister monolith among white and shining pedestals, rises the gloomy, horror-inspiring tragedy, "The Master of Ballantrae," corresponding in its unredeemed tragedy to Scott's "Bride of Lammermoor." One difference is that Scott's tragedy is the classic tragedy-of-fate, Stevenson's the more awful Shakespearian tragedy-of-character. So, for parallels to such a character as the Master of Ballantrae, we must look, as I have said, to Shakespeare himself, in Iago and Richard III., to Milton's Satan, to Goethe's Mephistopheles. That surely is compliment enough to pay mortal man! But is it not just? is it not deserved? But I resent a great deal in the second part of the story, and I am very curious to know what would have been the effect had Stevenson taken what would have, I believe, been Shakespeare's way with such a tragic tangle, and ended with a general holocaust. What a true tragic finale it would have been to let the Master triumph, as we feel he could, in his evil work, complete the seduction

of his brother's wife, the estrangement of his children, and then in an hour of ill-judged diabolic triumph draw the avenging sword of his injured brother on himself and the faithless wife, and finally on his own desolated heart.

But it is too late to speculate; it is enough to say that the Master of Ballantrae stands alone, so far as my reading goes, as the incarnation of polished, fascinating and complete villainy.

With regard to Stevenson's two unfinished works, perhaps there is little to be added to what I have already said. The one, St. Ives, maintains his reputation as a brilliant and ever interesting *raconteur*. "Weir of Hermiston" does something more. It shows Stevenson reaching up to an imposing style of creative work, above anything he had yet attempted. Torso as it is, the figure of Weir of Hermiston looms out large upon us like some ancient colossal figure, or like Saturn and the other gods in "Hyperion." And this fragment of Stevenson's work will probably serve Stevenson's fame as well as "Hyperion" has served that of Keats. It may well take its place as a colossal Caryatid among the columns that hold aloft his monument in "eternal bronze."

I feel that to press the argument further would be to weaken an impregnable position with superfluous outworks. But, if any think all these insufficient to keep the flame of any man's fame burning clear down the centuries, let him remember the sweet souvenir Stevenson left us in "The Child's Garden of Verses," his pleasant keepsake of "An Island Night's Entertainments," or the grim memento of "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."

But Stevenson has done more than give us his works. In his letters, in a thousand touches in his essays, in his travels, in his stories, he has given us himself. If Long John Silver, the Master of Ballantrae, Alan Breck and Catriona, and every one of the creations of his fertile fancy should dissolve and "leave no wrack behind," there will still shine out of his pages the eloquent eyes and the bright, brown, roguish, pathetic smile of the sad, indomitable, gay Robert Louis Stevenson himself.

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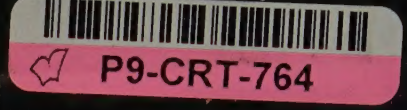
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